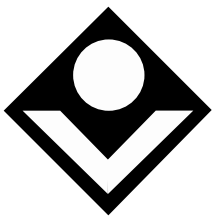
LITERATURE AND BELIEF

Edited by Daniel K. Muhlestein



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EDITOR'S PREFACE

This issue of *Literature and Belief* is both catholic in the sense that its essays cover a variety of topics and Catholic in the sense that several of the essays explore select aspects of life in Catholicism or discuss the life and work of the great Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor.

In "Altar Boy"—the personal essay that inaugurates the issue—John L. Stanizzi looks back on his days as an altar boy at St. Mary's church with nostalgia, humor, and a dollop of gentle irony. "Those were good times," he concludes. "I wasn't in any trouble. And I always felt a little holy, a little closer to Jesus" (7).

Maintaining holiness is hard, however, and in many cases, the heaven-sent impulse to search for God and desire holiness is either corrupted or counterfeited in the pursuit of other, more earthly rewards. Certainly O'Connor thought so. And in "The Jesus Business: Flannery O'Connor and the Economy of Redemption," Andrew J. Ball makes a persuasive case that O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is best understood as a demonstration of the ways in which capitalism—and its attendant consumer culture—turn the quest for personal and spiritual betterment into simply yet another commercial exchange:

> Each of O'Connor's characters is unable to extricate themselves from the manner of thinking and being that is characteristic of consumer culture. Each is radically materialistic, and as such, immensely egotistical. Personal and spiritual transformation or betterment, as a result of this immersion, can only be conceived of in terms of commercial exchange. Salvation is commodified and is understood strictly in terms of an economy of immediate transaction. For O'Connor, the popular avenues of both religious and existential upbuilding are wholly co-opted by American consumer culture and have deteriorated to the grotesque state represented in *Wise Blood*. (10)

O'Connor identifies a second counterfeit to holiness in her story "The Lame Shall Enter First." There, the impulse to worship God

has been replaced by the impulse to play God—to use the secular methods and perspectives of the social sciences to create personhood anew. O'Connor's story exemplifies her antipathy toward the social sciences of her time, and as Brian Fehler points out in "Flannery O'Connor, Richard M. Weaver, and Midcentury Conservative Critiques of Social Science Discourse," O'Conner's story embodies three of the critiques of social science expressed by O'Connor's contemporary Richard M. Weaver: self-deception, lack of a unified ontological basis, and dishonest optimism. In the story, the protagonist is a professional sociologist named Sheppard. Sheppard attempts to use the perspectives of social science to both remake a juvenile delinquent into a superior version of himself and to persuade Sheppard's only son to quit mourning the death of his mother. The result is tragedy: a more hardened delinquent and a dead son. In Fehler's view, that tragedy—and in fact the story generally—makes clear that "O'Connor's critique of the social sciences . . . is as vigorous as those of critics such as Ransom and Cowley, but unlike theirs, her response grows out of a special ethic of responsibility—an ethic that is characteristic of both her understanding of the purpose of art and of her role as a Catholic artist" (32).

Part of Cheryl D. Coleman's analysis in "Unapologetic Goodness in Patrick Gale's *A Perfectly Good Man*" is based upon O'Connor's 25 January 1957 letter to a friend. But though O'Connor's letter provides a convenient lens through which to examine select aspects of Gale's novel, both the novel and Coleman's essay are catholic rather than Catholic—the novel's protagonist is Father Barnaby Johnson, a priest in the Church of England, and Coleman's analysis highlights a challenge faced by writers of faith generally: how much harder it is to describe good than evil. Using Thomas à Kempis's assertion that "[a]ll perfection in this life hath some imperfection bound up with it; and no knowledge of ours is without some darkness" as a guide, Coleman argues persuasively that *A Perfectly Good Man* is able to portray goodness in ways that may resonate with the sensibilities of even a jaded contemporary reader:

> [Father] Johnson struggles with his own failings, doubts, and loss of faith, so goodness in Gale's novel is not equated with perfection though the novel's title can give readers pause. Goodness, in fact, does not require *human* perfection in the Christian realm; à Kempis repeatedly reminds followers of Christ that though they should strive for righteousness, humans are imperfect, sin can be forgiven, and belief can overcome doubt. (52)

In "Chiyo-ni: Seeking Suchness," Julie Allen explores various of the connections among history, culture, art, and goodness as well. The artist she discusses, though, is a Buddhist nun rather than a Church of England priest. And the version of "goodness" she describes is distinctly Buddhist: it is an expression of beauty which—in the words of D. T. Suzuki—finds joy and balance and harmony in "the suchness of things. Flowers are flowers, mountains are mountains, I sit here, you stand there, and the world goes on from eternity to eternity, this is the suchness of things" (qtd. in 93). Bashō ably represents this Buddhist tradition, of course, but so—argues Allen—does Chiyo-ni, who at the time of her death in 1775 was Japan's most renowned living poet of haiku. Chiyo-ni's farewell haiku—which was spoken shortly before her death—can be taken as a stellar example of the Buddhist ideal of suchness. As Allen observes, in the poem Chiyo-ni "shares her desire for spiritual detachment, as her focus on the beauty of the moon speaks of a separate but present aspect of this world. The moon lights the night sky from its distant position in the heavens. She accepts the 'suchness' of her death while still seeking the beauty of life":

> *Tsuki mo mite ware wa kono yo o kashiku kana*
> Looking also at the moon
> I write to this world
> "yours truly" (107)

The issue's concluding essay—Terry W. Thompson's "'The Genius of Famine Descending': Ichabod Crane and the Third Horseman of Revelation"—explores not the suchness of spiritual detachment but

the consequences of human avarice. Noting parallels between the description of Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and the description of the Third Horseman in Revelation, Thompson brings unexpected interpretive weight to bear on Irving's enigmatic description of Crane as "the genius of famine descending" (117). In Thompson's intertextual reading of secular and sacred texts, avarice is more than mere averse and Crane more than a mere schoolmaster from Connecticut: "it is the Third Horseman of the Apocalypse, generally seen as the most enigmatic and mysterious of the four, who is echoed and evoked by the gaunt silhouette of the ambitious Yankee schoolmaster who hails from out of state and harbors secret dreams of gaining great wealth at someone else's expense" (114).

—Daniel K. Muhlestein

Altar Boy

John L. Stanizzi
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The first time I heard Latin, I remember thinking how beautiful the language sounded. Add the Kyrie to the Latin, toss in some incense, and I was hooked. I wanted to be able to say those words. Incense wafting from Father Shanley's censer. Mrs. McCarthy playing the organ and singing the Kyrie. And perhaps most important to me, wearing the cassock and surplice. I loved the look of that long black robe and the beautiful, white, angel-winged surplice.

I began studying to become an altar boy in the third grade. Any boys interested in becoming an altar boy received a little card with all the things written on it that you had to say. *Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam. Et quáre trístis incédo, dum afflígit me inimícus?* I still remember lots of it. It sounded so wonderful coming out of my mouth. We had to memorize that card and then try out at the church in front of Father.

The church, St. Mary's, was a tiny, white clapboard building, square and with a single steeple, a short spire, and one bell. It was beautiful. There were two rows of mahogany pews, a narrow center aisle, with the stations of the cross in relief against the walls on the outside aisles. The air was sepia. The windows were stained glass. It

was dark. A small rack at the front of the church held 40 or 50 votive candles which flickered perpetually in the half light. I used to really love lighting a candle. There was something both liberating and sanctified about it. I think it had something to do with holding the candle-lighter to an already lit candle, setting a tiny flame free, and then replacing that flame on an unlit candle, while saying something like "God bless Zia Rosa." My mother told me I always had to say a prayer for somebody . . . Zia Rosa, Uncle Dan, or Gramma Cirone. Somebody. I guess just lighting a candle, without the prayer was kind of half-baked and missed the point of the whole thing. Like I said, I didn't really "pray," but I said something. What I remember most is how awesome I thought it was to light the candle. It was fun. And it even felt a little spiritual in a way I didn't quite understand yet.

It was fall when altar boy tryouts happened. Maybe late October. The church was right across the street from the school. We walked together, the seven or eight of us trying out, and as we crossed the street in the chilly fall air, nervous and excited, we tested each other, ready to try to become altar boys. I remember Anthony, Tommy, and Mikey. I remember opening the church's front door. It squeaked and reverberated and popped with a faint echo that murmured through the empty church. Father Shanley was standing on the altar looking big and impressive and a little scary. He told us, in a deep, echoey voice, to come up to the front, kneel, and wait for him to begin. I was nervous, but I clearly remember being more excited than scared. He stood before each of us in turn, choosing random sections of the Mass. And in his big, chanty voice he'd sing *Dominos vobiscum*. And I'd say *Et cum spiri tu tu o*. Father would chant, *Introibo ad alteri Dei*, and I'd say *Ad deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*. It was cool, Father kind of singing his part and listening for us to answer him. I nailed it. I had that stuff indelibly etched on my brain. I had the Latin down pat.

It seems to me that Father came the very next day to tell us who "made it," who would now be the new altar boys. I was among the boys who had made the cut, and I was scheduled to start the next Sunday. I recall being paired with an older altar boy, one who knew his way around the altar during Mass. Kevin Dwyer, one of my idols.

He would motion to me with his eyes, or whisper very, very quietly what we were supposed to be doing. I was a little nervous at first, but in no time I was as comfortable walking around the altar as I was walking around my house. There was really nothing to it. Know when to ring the sanctus bells, know where to be on the altar when Father needed you. Bow after everything you did. It was pretty easy, and I really liked it . . . most of the time, though admittedly, the older I got the less exciting it was. It had started to feel a little more like a job. I was training the new kids now. And the cassock and surplice that I had so loved when I was a kid, was really, really small for me. It came about halfway down my shins, and the surplice was a tad too tight. But there was no way my mother was buying me a new one. I was halfway through 8th grade and she wasn't going to waste the money when I'd be getting out of there pretty soon anyway.

I was sure that I had the best cassock of any of the altar boys. All of their cassocks either zipped up the front or buttoned. But mine? Mine was new-fangled high tech. Mine was Velcro! I certainly thought I was very, very sharp. No one else had a Velcro surplice but me, and getting out of it after Mass was simple—one pull and I was out. Of course, it also invited mischief, too. Once in a while, if we were in the sacristy getting ready for Mass, the urge would overcome one of the guys and they'd grab the front of my surplice and just tear it open with that loud Velcro sound, thinking they were being really amusing. And it was pretty funny, too. Sometimes. Other times I wasn't in the mood for screwing around.

Like I said, by 8th grade the surplice was pretty small, but I wasn't getting a new one. It was my last year. And speaking of my last year, when I think of all the ways between 3rd grade and 8th grade that I had gotten into trouble, I never once got into trouble as altar boy. Maybe it was just because I liked doing it. Maybe it was because Father Shanley just wasn't as nuts as the sisters were, and instead of looking at me as a bad kid he just looked at me as kind of a funny kid. I liked that about him. I knew he actually liked me. I could tell. And that helped to make being an altar boy fun.

I had to serve weddings, funerals, stations of the cross, and the occasional Requiem High Mass. I really liked the High Mass, the

pageantry, the chanting. It was awesome. But I think my very favorite was The Stations of the Cross. All during lent we would be assigned days. There was a list put up on Father Shanley's office wall, and we were to check it. We'd usually have to do one full week every day after school. And I didn't mind it one bit. In fact, I liked it a lot. Like I said before, the stations were carved out of wood and were in relief on the inside walls of the church, seven on one wall and seven on the other. Serving the stations during the week was nice because usually there would be only one or two people in the whole church, so it was all dark, and especially echoey because it was nearly empty. And I liked following the story. I always got these funny, kind of sad/good feelings during the stations, especially the 9th, 10th, and 11th, when Jesus falls for the third time, all beaten and bloody and exhausted. And then they rip his clothes off, and he's all cut up and bruised and now everybody can see that awful sight. And then, worst of all, Jesus is nailed to the cross. Don't get me wrong. I remember being moved and really interested in every station, but those three really got to me. Serving the stations always made me feel closer to Jesus than any of the other things I did as an altar boy. I think because it's such an incredible story and it's impossible not to be moved by it. For all the screwing around we did, nobody screwed around during stations. Nobody. It was too serious a thing. Too sad a story. All the stuff that happens to Jesus on that walk . . . like when he meets his mother right after he fell down the first time. That's really sad. And it's such a relief when Simon of Cyrene helps him for a minute. I always felt a little at ease then, too. And I don't know why, but it always got me when Veronica comes out of the crowd to wipe Jesus' face. If I was actually going to cry during stations that would have been when.

And when stations were over I'd have to walk home. It would be getting dark, and it was cold, and I felt so good. I felt Holy. Close to Jesus. But you know, the closer I got to home, the colder I got, and the sadder. I knew that whatever good Holy feelings had gotten into my body during those quiet, sad Stations of the Cross would begin to fade away and my thoughts would be taken over by anxiety and worry about what would happen to me when I got home. Some days

I'd get in trouble at home because Sister thought it was necessary to call my mother and tell her about the bad things I was doing in school. I wonder if she'd still call if she knew what trouble I got into after she called my house; I wonder if she would still have called. I kind of think she would. And if it wasn't Sister calling home, it would be something else. Maybe my mother had gotten into it with my father, and since he wasn't there I was the next best thing. Or maybe nothing specific had happened. We'd just get into some argument over something stupid and that would be that. The fight was on. Maybe I didn't dry the dishes dry enough. Maybe I set the table wrong. Maybe I complained when she told me to take out the garbage. Who knows? It didn't take much, but whatever it was, it completely erased that nice warm Stations of the Cross feeling I had when I was walking home in the cool dusk air.

Most of my time at St. Mary's I just felt like the bad kid who was always in some kind of trouble, causing problems, and getting punished. But during Lent, even though I probably didn't act like it, I always felt pretty good. Kind of holy and sure about how I felt about Jesus and glad He was around to help me. But those kinds of feelings really only happened during Lent, and mostly when I served the Stations of the Cross. Before and after Lent, it was the same antics, and the same perpetual battle with the nuns who were convinced that I was the worst kid to ever march through the holy halls of St. Mary's.

When I think about it now, being an altar boy was probably the best thing I did at St. Mary's. I never felt pressure to behave. I just behaved. And I really think my behavior had to do with Father Shanley's treatment of me. It wasn't that he treated me differently from the other kids. No. It was that he treated me just the *same* as the other kids. And he wasn't afraid to laugh. And he liked to smile and joke around with us. And when it came time to serve Mass with him you just felt good about it, you wanted to do it, you didn't feel like doing anything wrong. You even got to know how much wine and how much water to pour from the cruets into Father's chalice. We were really young, but we weren't stupid. We knew for sure that Father liked the wine. I remember so clearly. Father would hold out

his chalice and I'd pour in the wine, and not just a little wine, but the whole, entire cruet. Then I'd try to pour the water in, but the minute I tipped the cruet Father would push it away with his chalice with a loud *clink!*, so that maybe, *maybe* one drop of water got in. Yeah, like I said, we were just kids, but we knew without a doubt that Father liked his wine and he wasn't about to mess it up by diluting it with a lot of water. We all thought it was pretty funny.

Even going to confession wasn't terrible. I mean, I'd be nervous thinking about whispering my sins to Father Shanley in the darkness of the confessional, but I did it. I'd wait outside the "booth," rehearsing my confession, and when whoever was ahead of me came out, I'd head in. There was always some kind of exchange between the forgiven and the waiting sinner. Mark probably rolled his eyes and smirked. Billy made the "I don't know" gesture, arms out, palms heavenward, a shrugging of the shoulders. And of course Mary Lennit and Elizabeth Edgarton had to position themselves in a pew just outside the booth, very close. That way, if they were extra quiet, they might hear me, hear my sins, and give me these looks when I came out. I hated that, but I had to go in.

I'd pull back the curtain, which always reminded me of a shower curtain, which is, I suppose, a pretty good metaphor for it. You went in kind of dirty and came out nice and clean. If I listened carefully, I could hear the person on the other side repeating their sins. But I also recall trying not to pay attention; there were some things that were still sacred to my young self and eavesdropping on someone else's screw-ups was one of them. Then I'd hear Father slide the wooden window cover closed with a *thwack!* Wait a beat. And with a swoosh he'd slide open the one in front of me, and there he would be, shrouded in half-darkness, and looking gauzy and Holy behind the screen. He never looked at me, either. He would be staring straight ahead, his head tilted toward me, right hand over his brow. And then I'd begin.

I liked the idea of the pact between Father and me. I knew that Father Shanley knew stuff about me that no one else knew, and the fact that, after Confession he still joked around with me meant that all those sins I told him about didn't amount to much of anything.

Especially because I'd been forgiven. Yes, after Confession, Father was still my friend.

And a funny thing about Confession. I remember . . . it must have been 3rd or 4th grade . . . those days when our "sins" were minimal but our fabrications about them monumental. We would be out in front of the church waiting to go into Confession. We would talk about what our sins were and what we were going to tell Father.

"What did you do?"
"I don't know. I guess I lied."
"Yeah, me too. And I answered my mother back."
"Yeah, and I stole a pack of gum from Prospect Drug."
"How about the Lord's name in vain?"
"Oh yeah. Lots."

And so there it was. *Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. I answered my mother back eleven times. I stole a pack of gum. I took the name of the Lord in vain eighteen times. I lied seven times.*

And "the lie" sin was always saved for last so that in case any of the other sins were just made up because when you're in 3rd grade, let's face it, there's pretty slim pickings in the sin department, the "lie" would cover any untruths you may have just told the priest and they'd be erased through Father's forgiveness. Confession. Done. Clean slate. I could die now and be sure to get into Heaven, at least for the next few hours when the sins would inevitably start to pile up again.

So yeah. For all my troubles. For all the anxiety and beatings and punishments, none of it ever came during those times when I was being an altar boy. Those were good times. I wasn't in any trouble. And I always felt a little holy, a little closer to Jesus. And, oh yeah, I had my beautiful white surplice and my Velcro cassock.

"Cross of Gold" by Victor Dubreuil, ca. 1896

The Jesus Business: Flannery O'Connor and the Economy of Redemption

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The critical debate surrounding Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* is largely fought along the line dividing the sacred and the secular, the former camp at odds over whether or not Hazel Motes is successfully redeemed,[1] the other reading the novel as either an "ironic study in pathology" (Satterfield 33) or an indictment of social deterioration (Donahoo 43; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as PP). Taking our cue from Jonathan Witt, who suggests that we attempt to find "a golden mean in our approach to [O'Connor's] body of work" (15), we can reconcile these two standpoints by reading the novel as a critique of rising American consumerism in the 1950s, related through a representation of its detrimental effects on the mind, body, and spirit of the South, both at the societal and individual levels. Taulkingham, wholly immersed in the consumer culture of cheap commodities, neon signs, and saturated with the images and discourse of advertising, is symbolic of the nascent, though paradigmatic change that O'Connor witnessed taking place in the South. With *Wise Blood*, O'Connor reflects on the

[1]See Witt, Wood, Satterfield, and Asals.

psychological and spiritual grotesquery that is the necessary outcome of the region's adoption of capitalist norms.

Each of O'Connor's characters is unable to extricate themselves from the manner of thinking and being that is characteristic of consumer culture. Each is radically materialistic, and as such, immensely egotistical. Personal and spiritual transformation or betterment, as a result of this immersion, can only be conceived of in terms of commercial exchange. Salvation is commodified and is understood strictly in terms of an economy of immediate transaction. For O'Connor, the popular avenues of both religious and existential upbuilding are wholly co-opted by American consumer culture and have deteriorated to the grotesque state represented in *Wise Blood*. Because of the entrenchment of consumerism in both the social relations of the people and in their individual psyches, Hazel Motes—though he is capable of reflecting on its inauthentic nature—ultimately fails to free himself from an economic conception of redemption. Motes's notion of redemption is fundamentally flawed as a result of its reduction to the structure and logic of capitalism. O'Connor suggests that this crucial misconception and his rejection of the Incarnation make Motes unable to transcend his egotism and attain salvation.

1. Consuming Conversion

Each character in *Wise Blood* is burdened by a materialism that shapes the way they perceive themselves and their own potential self-transformation. O'Connor sees this as a pressing danger in part because this manner of thinking puts too great an emphasis on the material world of commodities as the only sphere of personal fulfillment, one that is ultimately groundless and deceptive. And yet, she does not seek to disparage the value of the earthly realm as such. This is a common misreading of her use of the grotesque, which overlooks the importance of the Incarnation in her employment of this technique.[2] Christ's embodiment in the Incarnation is, for O'Connor, the

[2]See Srigley 55–89ff (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SA*), Desmond, and Gentry.

ultimate manifestation of the essential union of the divine and material realms. For O'Connor, the modern age "speciously believed in its own capacity for achieving wholeness exclusive of the divine" (Desmond 53), and it is this problem that she represents through her use of the grotesque. Her use of the grotesque is a method of critiquing the norms of consumer culture that locate value in the material alone. In a 1959 letter she writes that "some revolt against our exaggerated materialism is long overdue" (*Habit of Being* 336); her characters' inability to wage just such a revolt, even on a personal level, is what constitutes their grotesquery. Jon Lance Bacon writes that "materialism defines the existence of Hazel and the other characters. Their lives are circumscribed by the material world, understood in two ways—as a world in which the spiritual has no place, as a world in which everything is for sale" (36; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as FS). In this sense, consumer society is perceived as offering the only means for self-alteration, identity formation, and self-realization, each being "for sale" in the form of commodities. According to this manner of thinking, "the spiritual has no place" in individual fulfillment.

Enoch Emery is the character "most closely identified with consumerism" (FS 29); we read that he has a "fondness for Supermarkets" and that "it was his custom to spend an hour or so in one every afternoon . . . browsing around among the canned goods and reading the cereal stories" (O'Connor, *Wise Blood* 130; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WB*). O'Connor sets Emery "against a background of alarm clocks, toilet waters, candies, sanitary pads, fountain pens, and pocket flashlights," among the images, rhetoric, and trivialities of consumer society to indicate the horizon of his worldview (*WB* 135). These alone are the constituent elements that comprise Emery's subjectivity and it is only within these limits that he can (re)make himself. O'Connor writes that Emery "was not a boy without ambition: he wanted to become something. He wanted to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads. He wanted some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand" (*WB* 193). Emery's conception of his identity, his criteria for self-worth, and his sense of what constitutes personal accomplishment

are all wholly informed by the images and language of consumer culture. Completely divorced from the realm of the spiritual, the only potentials for self-transcendence are through the acquisition of commodities or by conforming to an outward image validated by advertising. In this way, Emery's idea of ultimate personal fulfillment is limited to a single image or to the attainment of a particular job. Not only is this immensely superficial and restricted, but is a life-objective completely devoid of a sense of morality, community, or responsibility.

In her depiction of Emery's attempt to realize his ambition of seeing "a line of people waiting to shake his hand," O'Connor problematizes the superficiality and egocentrism that inevitably result from the adoption of materialist values. Because Emery bases his conception of achievement on the images of advertising alone, he believes that he can wholly transform and better himself simply by donning a new appearance, one that has been validated by consumer culture. He sees this as an act of self-transcendence, a means to become something more than he was before. Since a superficial and immediate change is all that is required, and since this existential aim makes no valuations concerning its means of achievement, Emery readily resorts to violence in order to obtain the gorilla suit. O'Connor argues that the manner of redemption—meant here simply as a deliverance from a base and hollow existence into a higher, more valuable and fulfilling form of life—that is sanctioned by consumer culture is one that is seen as immediately accessible through a superficial change. But for O'Connor, this is antithetical to true redemption, which for her is a continual process that alters one's spirit rather than simply one's appearance. This mode of self-transcendence—the relinquishment of one superficial aspect of yourself in exchange for another—is based solely in the structure and logic of commercial exchange and can only be achieved through purchasing more commodities. Therefore, this form of redemption intends only to sustain the economic system rather than serving as a means to secure any real comprehensive change in people.

This form of inauthentic redemption is repeated—again figured as being enacted simply by changing one's appearance—when Motes and Solace purchase new suits. Both discard their old suits,

and symbolically their old selves, when they assume the new identities embodied by these products. O'Connor writes that after buying the glare-blue suit Motes put "his army suit in a paper sack and he stuffed it into a trashbox on the corner" (*WB* 19). Similarly, when Hazel demands that Solace remove his suit, already the defining feature of Hazel's identity and, as such, unavailable to be the identifying marker of Solace as well, Solace protests, lamenting "I thrown my othern away" (*WB* 205). By acquiring new suits, Solace and Motes believe they are somehow washed of the sins associated with the old suits, which they have repented of and thrown away. They are baptized by a material rather than a spiritual gift and as a result they feel as if they have been given a new start, a clean slate. They feel that the possession of this commodity fulfills their need for salvation. As Jean Baudrillard states in his *Consumer Society*, the consumption of merchandise invokes a sense of "magical salvation"; the "metonymic discourse of the consumable," where one "purchases the part for the whole," allows us to wholly alter our perceived being simply by exchanging one part for another (30).

In the New Testament, one way in which redemption is understood is as a deliverance from oppression (1 Cor. 15.20–28, 54, 56–57) (O'Collins 222). Hazel perceives his purchase of the Essex as the means to actualize his deliverance from the oppression of human interdependence. He sees the Essex as his means to complete autonomy and self-reliance. It serves to "confirm his self-conception as a totally free individual" who can achieve wholeness as a human being exclusive of the divine and other members of the community (FS 34). With it he can completely isolate himself and maintain his potential for immediate mobility. For Hazel, the car is an embodiment of his freedom. The commodity serves as the instrument for Hazel's self-imposed alienation from the community and his unwillingness to accept responsibility or accountability for anyone other than himself. Motes proclaims that "nobody with a good car needs to be justified" (*WB* 109). The possession of the commodity does not replace the need for redemption, but fulfills it, making redemption through the blood of Christ unnecessary.

Bacon argues that "the value he places on the Essex shows that Hazel has succumbed to a way of thinking fostered by consumer

society. He links his identity with a product of American industry, a car" (FS 34). But, because it is destroyed, the Essex ultimately fails Hazel in this regard. Bacon continues, "the destruction of the product with which he has identified himself forces Hazel to consider the possibility of some reality other than the material" (FS 35). It is just this emblematic failure of the material that leads O'Connor to write, in a 1953 letter to Brainard Cheney: "I didn't see the patrolman as the tempter on the mountain top . . . when he pushed that car over, he was an angel of light, I am sure" (*Correspondence* 3). Hazel misinterprets the car as the means to his liberation rather than, as O'Connor would have us believe, the very thing that prevents it. For O'Connor, we require deliverance from the oppression and corrupting force of consumer culture. Commodities do not fulfill our potential for self-transcendence but rather impede it. In this sense, the patrolman is an angel of redemption insofar as he destroys the obstacle hindering Hazel's self-realization. Whether or not Hazel makes good on this, we will discuss further in section three. For O'Connor, "consumers who identify themselves with products, or with the imagery used to advertise these products, will be disappointed and betrayed in their search for self-realization" (FS 34). Indeed, we find that both Motes and Emery suffer immensely by attempting to remake themselves through identification with the objects and images of commerce. Not only does O'Connor argue that consumer culture's infiltration of the South has warped individuals' relation to commodities, misconstruing their power by imbuing them with redemptive and transformative significance, but also that such infiltration has simultaneously produced and intensified widespread fetishism, effecting a sacralization of capitalism itself. As a result, salesmen are transformed into priestly figures while preachers adopt the discourse of capitalist economy, offering redemption in the form of economic exchange.

2. False Profits

For O'Connor, the most insidious change that has occurred in the South as a result of the spread of American consumer culture is the fundamental shift in the way that people understand the nature of

Christian redemption. One might attribute the watering-down of this theological concept in the South to the discourse of evangelicalism. O'Connor would concur, but would go a step further, attributing the deterioration of this concept to its progressive conflation with commercial exchange. As a result, preachers begin to sound like salesmen and salesmen begin to sound like preachers. Moreover, the similarity does not simply end with their rhetorical styles. While religion becomes increasingly desacralized as it adopts the rhetoric and logic of capitalism, consumerism, in turn, becomes increasingly sacralized as it becomes more discursively indistinguishable from religion. Through her depiction of the novel's evangelists, O'Connor argues that "American religion has been appropriated by the 'salesman's world'" (FS 39). As a result, faith and redemption have become commodities that can be purchased as one would a potato peeler. The "Jesus business," in the world of *Wise Blood*, has become precisely that (*WB* 40). For O'Connor, this inauthentic, grotesque deformation of Christianity merely serves "to sustain the civic religion of laissez-faire capitalism" (FS 44).

We first encounter the two, ironically similar, kinds of salesman-preacher at the same moment in the text. The seller of the potato peelers—who stands "in front of his altar" (*WB* 34)—and the evangelist Asa Hawks each vie for the attention of their spontaneous congregation, hawking wares that promise to change the lives of the believers-purchasers forever, and only at a minimal cost. O'Connor's choice to publish this chapter of *Wise Blood* as "The Peeler" prior to the release of the novel speaks to its significance for the author's overall project. Each salesman-preacher presents a sales pitch to the congregation, attempting to sell a commodity of convenience. However, it is the secular man that stands before an altar—for O'Connor the profane altar of consumerism—who markets the peeler, while it is the passing evangelical who advertises the easy liquidation of the congregation's need for redemption at the low price of a mere nickel. By proclaiming, "if you won't repent, give up a nickel," Hawks offers an out for those who do not want to attain redemption authentically (*WB* 36). In effect he is selling Protestant indulgences. As a Catholic writer, O'Connor is fully aware of the divisive

role that the sale of indulgences played in the development of the Protestant Reformation. With the rise of consumer culture, she argues, Protestantism reverts to the same deplorable practices that initially engendered its rebellion. Martin Luther's conviction that one could not merely purchase redemption—either monetarily or through works—was a fundamental aspect of Protestant doctrine, and yet, as capitalism consumes the South, becoming the dominant ideological power, this becomes a conventional practice and aspect of evangelical discourse.

Robert Donahoo argues that "the potato peeler serves as a metaphor for a type of action that O'Connor saw as prevalent in her culture," namely "the American tendency to address a problem by changing its appearance," and imbuing money with the divine power to instantly change one's quality of life through the purchase of products, now the sole means of attaining redemption (PP 54). O'Connor's characters perceive redemption as a kind of "potato peeler change"; just as the "potato [goes] into the box and then in a second, back[s] out the other side, white," the consumerist version of redemption is one that is only skin deep, acquired with minimal effort and resulting in only superficial change (*WB* 38). Donahoo correctly recognizes that "the motivation O'Connor saw lying behind" the propagation of this kind of inauthentic, immediate, superficial form of redemption was "the secular push of economics" (PP 51). Ultimately, "the promise of instantaneous conversion, whatever its religious trappings, is a tool for economic exploitation—an advertising lure whose value is not 'truth' but its ability to generate sales" (PP 52). Perhaps the best example of this to be found in *Wise Blood* is in the case of Hoover Shoats, who markets redemption as a commodity of convenience; and though he presents this in the guise of a true religion, it is, underneath, merely an exploitative scheme to make money.

Hoover Shoats is the most straightforward example of O'Connor's critique of the commodification of salvation. Shoats represents the pinnacle of the conflation of marketing and evangelical discourse, where the salesman and the preacher become one and the same. He advertises redemption as one would a modern gadget or a high-tech,

time-saving device that one can take pride in owning, a product that will set its owner apart from their neighbors. Moreover, he promises that this product—salvation—cannot only save your soul but can also make you more attractive and likeable. Shoats barks, "this church is up-to-date! When you're in this church you can know that there's nothing or nobody ahead of you" (*WB* 153). Here, redemption is marketed as a means of attaining superiority over those who do not yet possess this new technology. Using the rhetoric of 1950s advertising, Shoats promises that, by purchasing redemption, you can "win friends and [be] loved" for just "a few dimes" (*WB* 153). The preacher-salesman boasts that this is an extremely affordable and immediate means to achieving nothing less than communal acceptance, holistic self-realization, and even the right to an air of entitlement and superiority. He says, "it'll cost you each a dollar, but what is a dollar? . . . Not much to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you" (*WB* 153). Shoats and Hawks represent the pure distillation of consumer society's usurpation of religious discourse and the way in which this transformation has wholly altered the way modern Americans conceive of the nature and purpose of redemption and the means by which one can achieve it. Redemption can be understood here in either the Christian sense or in the secular sense, as the deliverance from an empty and meaningless life onto the path to ultimate self-realization through the existential enrichment of one's life. Either way, these characters embody a notion of redemption wholly corrupted by capitalist economy, a form of corruption O'Connor takes pains to critique by way of Motes's abhorrence of this trend.

Hazel has an apparently radical aversion to this economy of redemption and to those who enter into it. He reviles the salesman at his profane "altar," insisting that "it don't cost you any money to know the truth" (*WB* 34, 154). Hazel sets his own church, one which "won't cost you nothing to join," apart from the unholy economy of redemption practiced by Hoover and Hawks, where you can seemingly buy your salvation monetarily or symbolically as though purchasing a commodity (*WB* 51). Hazel's emphatic belief that redemption "don't cost you any money" and that "you can't know it for money," suggests that, for him, you cannot come to the knowledge or

self-realization that redemption entails by simply purchasing it (*WB* 154). And yet, as in many other ways, Hazel fundamentally contradicts himself insofar as he enters into a similar economy, an economy of atonement, which he participates in through acts of self-mortification. Motes's ultimate inability to fully extricate himself from the logic of consumer society is what prevents him from being fully redeemed, either in the sacred or the secular sense.

3. The Economy of Atonement

Motes's self-blinding and his subsequent, ascetic regiment of self-mortification are interpreted by many as evidence of his repentance and redemption. Mrs. Flood finds that the shoes he wears on his interminable walks are "lined with gravel and broken glass and pieces of small stone," and she later discovers that he sleeps with "three strands of barbed wire wrapped around his chest" (*WB* 226, 228). He explains that he does this in order "to pay," and when Mrs. Flood asks, "pay for what," he simply responds "it don't make no difference for what . . . I'm paying" (*WB* 226). While Hazel does not think that he can immediately attain redemption through a one-time purchase, he does conceive of his salvation in terms of economic debt. His sense of atonement is wholly pervaded by the logic of capitalism. Though he recognizes the inauthentic nature of Shoats's and Hawks's brand of redemption, he nevertheless continues to misunderstand humanity's relation to the divine as being "measured in terms of moral debt" (*SA* 84). For O'Connor, this recasting of the relation between the human and the divine in economic terms is further evidence of how consumerism deforms our perception of reality. It is this continued misconception that ultimately prevents Motes from being fully and authentically redeemed.

Hazel's self-blinding, though done in order "to pay," and therefore seemingly to repent, only serves to extend his previous effort to become wholly autonomous from both the divine and from others. Rather than transcending this former endeavor, it fully actualizes it by affecting a complete rejection of the material world and all those in it. According to O'Connor's notion that the material world is

equally as significant as the spiritual—a component of her incarnational conception of reality—this act is anything but a laudable one. By turning completely inward, Motes reaches the furthest limit of his egotism. In a letter, O'Connor describes the path to salvation as one where "you are continually turning inward toward God and away from your own egocentricity . . . you have to see this selfish side of yourself in order to turn away from it" (*HB* 430). It is precisely this moment of recognizing one's own egocentricity that Motes fails to experience. Susan Srigley writes,

> even after blinding himself (and including his reasons for doing it) Hazel does not acknowledge his dependence on God for wholeness . . . he does not see . . . his connection to God as anything other than that of a debt to a debtor. In fact, Hazel's final desire to be rid of any debt he might owe, which dominates his thinking throughout the novel, is directed almost entirely toward gaining his autonomy rather than acknowledging his dependence. (*SA* 64)

In accord with her incarnational conception of reality, where the mundane and transcendent realms are equally significant and inextricably linked, O'Connor argues that rejecting the material world in favor of the spiritual or, in Hazel's case, for an escape into one's ego, is equally as deficient as rejecting the divine by becoming materialistic. The consumerist notion of an economy of redemption—practiced by characters like Enoch Emery and embodied by the salesmen-preachers—on the one hand, and the economy of atonement practiced by Hazel Motes on the other, are for O'Connor two modalities of the same process by which the logic and structure of capitalist exchange has pervaded our sense of salvation and distorted our perception of reality.

Donahoo argues that, "though Hazel does think of his penance in economic terms . . . he makes it clear that the object he seeks has no material existence. . . . Economic exchange and gain have ceased to be merely a goal or motivator; in reality they have ceased to matter at all" (PP 55). For Donahoo, Motes successfully "choose[s] to abandon

the economic system built on quick conversion of services and goods into profits" (PP 55). But, by making entry into his church free, which is what sets him apart from the likes of Shoats, it is clear that economic gain was never either a goal or a motivator. Conversely, the structure of capitalist exchange remains both the motivator and constituent form of Hazel's penance. While his goal is not literally a monetary one, it is nevertheless best understood in terms of capitalist economy, where Motes's service, his penitence, is converted into a profit, namely his redemption. In this sense, economy has come to matter more than ever for Motes.

Similarly, one may consider Motes's choice to merely throw away the money "left over" at the end of the month as evidence of his "new relation to economic matters," interpreting this as symbolic of his disposal of the ideology of consumerism, but this is not the case (PP 54). Motes no longer has a need for money because his medium of legal tender has changed. Though the content of his payment is different, the form remains that of commercial exchange. Insofar as he pays his debts in flesh rather than in faith, his is an even more radical form of materialism than those previously described. It is in this way that O'Connor argues that the rising power of consumer culture serves to obscure any method of relation—either to the divine, or to one another—other than one that is formally capitalist, where the material and the corporeal comprise its content.

Further, one may claim that, because the word redemption derives from the Latin meaning "buying back," and because, as theologian Alister McGrath tells us, "the scriptural use of 'redemption' corresponds to the everyday use of the word," this means that both in its biblical and common usage, redemption is a term that has always regarded economic exchange (72; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *TB*).[3] Of course, it would be absurd to deny this, but we should consider the nature of this economic exchange to see what light this can shed on O'Connor's critique of consumerism's economy of redemption. The source of this theological concept originates in the New Testament and signifies the purpose and effect

[3]See also O'Collins 221.

of Christ's crucifixion. We are told there that redemption—in the form of Christ's crucifixion—was the ransom that was paid to the captor of man, the devil, in order to secure the liberation of humanity (*TB* 72). In this sense it is literally a "buying back." But if this is the case, in what sense is it inappropriate, according to O'Connor, for humanity to conceive of the achievement of redemption as a purchase? It would be helpful here to consider a scripture that is crucial to our understanding of the subtle distinction that O'Connor is considering in her representation of Hazel Motes and his emblematic misunderstanding of redemption. "Foreasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but by the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1.18–19). We are made to understand here that the individual has no need to, and indeed cannot, purchase redemption with silver and gold or with "corruptible things" such as commodities, because the price has already been paid with the blood of Christ. As Ralph C. Wood has put it, "no human payment is sufficiently generous to acknowledge the divine largesse. This deliverance costs . . . less than nothing because, as sheer grace, it is completely free" (105).

Motes is well aware of this biblical notion of redemption, as is evident when he describes his church as one "that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption," and in his desire for "a new kind of jesus . . . that can't waste his blood redeeming people with it, because he's all man and ain't got any God in him" (*WB* 101, 119). Motes desires a "jesus" that is of the material world alone, but this material, objectified "jesus" will still have divine significance insofar as it is to be the messianic figurehead of Motes's church. In effect, Motes desires to worship a new "jesus" that is—in the sense that it is a material production imbued with divine significance—a fetishized commodity. For O'Connor, a church without Christ, one that does not acknowledge the incarnational nature of reality, is one that is reduced to "the civic religion of laissez-faire capitalism" (FS 44).

For O'Connor, as long as Motes, and by association humanity at large, fails to recognize the incarnational significance of Christ as being the revelation of the necessary unity of the divine and the

corporeal, the material and the spiritual, one will inevitably fail to be redeemed. By putting himself in the authoritative position to buy back his liberation, Motes is occupying the place of God. For O'Connor, only God has the power to redeem, and as such Motes's occupation of the place of God is not only unnecessary but also profoundly idolatrous. In this way O'Connor suggests that it is the ideology of consumerism—which imbues man-made commodities with religious significance—that is to blame for the modern misunderstanding of the nature of redemption.

Though Hazel Motes immediately recognizes that Hoover Shoats's and Asa Hawks's brand of redemption has been corrupted by consumer culture, in many ways his own conception of salvation is equally shaped by the influence of capitalism. Insofar as he is unable to become liberated from this influence, Motes fails to be redeemed. But for O'Connor, this failure itself has a revelatory capacity. It is through our recognition of Motes's subtle contradictions that we come to realize our own complicity in the consumerist economy of redemption. In her prefatory note to the novel she asks, "[D]oes one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man" (*WB* iii). O'Connor suggests, then, that we must not understand Motes's failure to be redeemed in the traditional sense, as a defeat or a loss, but rather as a praiseworthy effort that, in his contention with his "many wills," reflects humanity's general struggle for the liberation of self-transcendence and the deliverance of redemption.

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Flannery O'Connor, Richard M. Weaver, and Midcentury Conservative Critiques of Social Science Discourse

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In her fiction and correspondence, Flannery O'Connor demonstrates particular disdain for secular social scientists, including such supposedly well-meaning people as Rayber in *The Violent Bear It Away* and Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First." O'Connor, who majored in social sciences while in college, wrote to her longtime correspondent Betty Hester years later, "In college I read works of social-science, so-called. The only thing that kept me from being a social-scientist was the grace of God and the fact that I couldn't remember reading the stuff but a few days after reading it" (*Collected Works* 905). It may be unclear whether the "so-called" in O'Connor's letter refers to the social sciences in general or to the works she had been assigned. In either case, O'Connor certainly seems to have held the work of social scientists in contempt. But why should that be the case? The Catholic Church certainly has a long history of advocating for the improvement of conditions in this world, while still preparing for the next. O'Connor, who trains her "rage of vision" on the Church as well as on secular society, reports, for example, the mixed results of a Jesuit's social advocacy in "The Displaced Person," but undoubtedly she reserves her sharpest criticism for those socially conscious individuals outside the Church.

To understand O'Connor's position and why she seems so out of sympathy with characters like Sheppard, we will consider O'Connor's work as part of a larger context of conservative criticism of postwar social science discourse. In the story "The Lame Shall Enter First," O'Connor's protagonist, Sheppard, works as a professional sociologist and director of City Recreation. He has been widowed for a year and volunteers Saturdays at a reformatory. In his job as recreation director, Sheppard attempts to fill young people's lives with constructive activities; at the reformatory, he counsels young people who have not benefitted from such programs. Certainly, the extent of Sheppard's seemingly selfless activities may suggest that he is filling his hours in order to avoid moments of honest introspection. He is, in Donald Hardy's description, a "self-satisfied and self-righteous do-gooder" (15). In addition to his work at the reformatory, Sheppard regularly attends the city council meetings, and he coaches a Little League baseball team. It is at the reformatory that Sheppard meets the so-called club-footed adolescent genius Rufus Johnson, who alternates his time between living on the streets, in the reformatory, or with a fanatical country grandfather. But, as we quickly learn, Sheppard, though apparently outwardly admirable, frequently deceives himself.

This type of character is easy for a regular reader of O'Connor to recognize. Robert Brinkmeyer writes that "Sheppard is O'Connor's (and her narrator's) typical intellectual—a person smitten with intellectual pride who believes not in the Lord but in himself" (92). Moreover, Sheppard is betrayed by his own empty language, which he uses to assuage his own inadequacies and to distance himself from his grief over his son. Rufus Johnson, though, poses a challenge to Sheppard's empty rhetoric. Sheppard, who has trained himself to think mainly in abstractions, is unprepared for the confrontation which occurs when Rufus refuses to be categorized by Sheppard's abstractions. Sheppard's "untrue" language and actions will have devastating consequences—consequences which Sheppard will likely no longer be able to ignore. Both Sheppard's language and his categories fail him, and as a consequence, he will be forced to realize the depths of his personal deception.

O'Connor's criticism of Shepherd is personal in the sense that she found her reading in the social sciences to be unfulfilling, but it is also reflective of a larger contemporary criticism of the social sciences as a discipline and profession in the 1940s and 1950s. By the middle of the twentieth century, social scientists had made professional gains in the establishment of government agencies, university departments, and academic journals. This professional apparatus brought social scientists a new measure of academic and public credibility, yet it also caught the notice of a number of critics.

The 1940s and 1950s were in many ways difficult decades for the profession and professors of the social sciences. Generally, the criticism aimed at sociology and related disciplines and practices originated with conservative academics and publications. The criticisms fell, for the most part, into two general categories: the assertion that social science was potentially pernicious and the claim that social scientists wrote badly. David Paul Haney surveys conservative attacks in the era on "the philosophical foundations of social science, asserting that its attempts to find sociological regularities in human behavior and relations threatened to overthrow the natural laws upon which civil society depended for a balance of both freedom and order" (186). In works such as the tellingly titled "Prophets, Priests, and Social Scientists," as well as *The Tyranny of Progress*, for example, social philosopher Albert Salomon asserted, in Haney's words, that "scientific sociology" presented itself as a kind of "secular religion that advanced a spiritually impoverished vision of social perfectability" and "elevated science to the status of incontrovertible verity" thereby "preparing the way for the totalitarianism of the twentieth century" (186). Political scientist David Easton noted particular "discontent with the way social science handles moral issues" (5). Critics of the time not only looked to the past but also sounded alarms for the present and future. In a 1952 article in *Fortune* magazine, for example, organizational analyst William Whyte warned of the possibility of sociological research leading to "social engineering" (88).

Clearly, O'Connor was not the only writer of the postwar years to criticize the "so-called," as she wrote, social scientists. In fact, several writers whose works were known to her, such as Reinhold Niebuhr

and Richard Weaver, or whom she had met, such as Malcolm Cowley, also expressed similar concerns. Cowley, whom O'Connor knew from Yaddo, criticized, like Niebuhr, the written style of sociological discourse. Cowley begins an article on the topic in *Reporter Magazine* with a story of a friend of his, a poet (unnamed) who decided to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology. Cowley later read this poet-friend's dissertation, and, as he wrote, "scolded" the friend, saying "'You have such a fine sense of the poet's craft . . . that you shouldn't have allowed the sociologists to seduce you into writing their professional slang'" (41). This friend later explained, "dropping his voice," and saying "'I knew my dissertation was badly written. . . . If I had written it in English, Professor [Blank] . . . would have rejected it'" (41). From this personal anecdote, Cowley moves on to a more general repudiation of sociological style. Conceding that a few of the "best men" in the field wrote well enough, Cowley argued that a "vast majority" of others "write in a language that has to be learned almost like Esperanto" (41). Cowley counts the various sins, as he sees them, of sociological style, especially those habits which lead to "pernicious" obfuscation, such as the use of too many abstract words, too many neologisms, an abundance (a *triumph*, he calls it) of compound nouns, and an absence of second-person pronouns, which results in the human "you" disappearing and the less human "the subject" taking "your" place (42).

Reinhold Niebuhr, another writer whose works were well known to O'Connor, criticized the social science of the era, specifically the work of a "naïve psychologist," as presented in a work of B.F. Skinner (84). Niebuhr finds Skinner's *Walden II* not at all utopian but rather alarming, picturing as it does an excessively conditioned community, one which "lacks the heroic and noble elements in humanity" (85). Niebuhr dislikes the picture of humanity presented in *Walden II* in which people are nice and pleasant, to be sure, but bland and predictable. General plans and programs for managed social improvement (as opposed to specific, targeted instances of help or aid), Niebuhr suggests, fail to consider the "unique human freedom" that is available to even "the simplest peasant" (84). (One sees this sort of freedom expressed by Rufus Johnson in "The Lame Shall Enter First" time and again, as he rejects Sheppard's plans of

improvement; poor Sheppard cannot imagine why the boy would rather eat from garbage cans than subscribe to Sheppard's own plan of managed improvement.) The kind of human freedom that Niebuhr recognizes "imparts a stubborn recalcitrance" that serves to make unpredictable humans "finally 'unmanageable'" (84). This state of being unmanageable, which Skinner's psychology attempts to overcome, represents the human condition itself for Niebuhr, both its "creativity" and its "destructiveness" (84).

During the 1940s and 1950s, then, critiques of the social sciences by non-social scientists proliferated. Such critiques also became fashionable among humanities faculties. Writing in *The Antioch Review* in 1958, historian R. E. McGrew suggested that: "the bitterest criticism [of social science] has come from the humanities" and that "humanists have attacked the social scientist for applying scientific methods to data which cannot be investigated scientifically" (276).[1] Among humanists, members of literature faculties were especially critical of the social sciences in the post-World War II era. In those decades, of course, the New Critics and the Southern Agrarians were especially influential in English departments. Thomas Daniel Young recognizes a central conflict between social science and literary criticism of the time, sympathetically remarking, about O'Connor's frequent editor, John Crowe Ransom:

> At a time when man is looking to science and social science for answers to questions that those disciplines cannot provide, Ransom realized that modern man was neglecting, through his own ignorance, one of the sources from which he could get the information he needed so desperately. That source was poetry, through which man is able to know the concrete particularities of the world in which he lives. (75)

[1]On page 277 of his "History and the Social Sciences," McGrew suggests that historians have "occupied a middle ground" in the "dispute" between the humanities and the social sciences, and that, as a historian, he hoped to serve as something of an arbiter in disciplinary arguments.

O'Connor, as we shall see, certainly shared a concern with knowing the kinds of concrete particularities Young writes about. In this, she was probably influenced by Ransom and Tate, by, as Katherine Hemple Prown writes, her "kinship with the Fugitive/Agrarians, whose conservative vision of southern culture she shared" (19).

Stephen Schryer writes that the New Critics' contempt emerged in response to the new model of sociological study established by Talcott Parsons of Harvard, in part because Parsons wished to replace the "literary-minded Chicago school" of sociological thought (which itself was influenced by Jane Addams's Hull House work and writings) with more scientific methods (669). Schryer argues that New Critics and "Parsonian" sociologists established their professional concerns and practices in explicit opposition to the other, resulting in "the eschewal of literary methods" by sociologists and the development, of the New Critics, into "formalist aesthetes interested in disseminating the apolitical practice of close reading throughout the academy" (669–70). Parsons's work, Schryer writes, "was to help transform sociology" to such a degree that "most American sociologists by the mid-1930s" had distanced themselves from literary or stylistic interests in writing (669). The concentration on (for the New Critics) or the rejection of (for the sociologists) literary and aesthetic qualities in their work became a recognized source of contention for professionals on both sides. Ransom, for example, writes in *God without Thunder* that "when our thinking is scientific or conceptual, we fail to observe the particular objects as particulars or as objects which are different, and contain a great many features not at all covered by the given concept. We attend only to what is constant or like among them, or to what has repetition-values" (59). (If we substitute *object* for *subject* in that quotation, we can see that O'Connor's Sheppard is guilty of the sort of observational failure Ransom describes.) Sociologist Parsons, for his part, intentionally rejects the aesthetic interest in the particular as uninteresting, and he seeks those repetition-values rejected by Ransom. Parsons, according to Schryer, preferred abstraction and the sort of categorization Ransom disliked: "in book after book, [Parsons] developed an ever-more-elaborate conceptual apparatus intended to categorize

and systematize all possible sociological knowledge" (667). Such a system gave rise to a peculiarly detached, jargon-filled writing style that became known as Parsonese, a style other sociologists adopted and that we already saw Crowley disparage. Even C. Wright Mills—a sociologist who wrote for more general audiences—shared Crowley's and other humanists' concerns with Parsonese (39). While Parsons's methods and style became influential, sociologists at the University of Chicago, the once dominant sociological school Parsons's Harvard had displaced, continued to argue for a less abstract form of social science. Chicago sociologist Robert Redfield, calling his discipline an art as well as a science, argued that the "art of social science cannot be inculcated, but, like other arts, it can be encouraged to develop. The exercise of that art can be favored by humanistic education" (189). Ransom, Tate, and others would no doubt have been pleased by Redfield's argument, but Redfield's (and Chicago's) view was no longer the leading one in social science. Instead, the rise of a more scientific approach in sociology departments and the influence of New Critics and Agrarians in English departments led to criticism from both sides, with O'Connor falling on the side of the "artists" and humanists.

It is important to note, however, that while O'Connor's critique of the social sciences shares some of the concerns of both the humanists generally and of the New Critics in specific, her response to the social sciences was also influenced by something deeper, her faith. What O'Connor is rejecting in the social sciences is an entire intellectual tradition that is characterized by the modern and that rejects claims of faith, what Parsons, himself, called the "nonrational moral consensus" (Scryer 669). O'Connor clearly places herself outside the modernist principles upon which social science philosophy rested. "For two centuries," O'Connor writes in "Novelist and Believer," "the popular spirit of each succeeding generation has tended more and more to the view that the mysteries of life will eventually fall before the mind of man" (158). Much of O'Connor's fiction rejects the view that modern methods of knowing are sufficient, and her self-satisfied protagonists are humbled time and again. Susan Srigley demonstrates that O'Connor's fiction, her art, results from a sense of

responsibility for, a fellow-feeling with, her readers. Srigley calls this O'Connor's ethic of responsibility and writes:

> An ethic of responsibility carries with it the implicit assumption that human beings, as spiritual and physical beings, no matter how limited they may be, are all worthy of love. The moral choice that O'Connor consistently dramatizes in her stories is between a life of responsibility for other human beings and a life ordered solely by the love of self. (5)

In "The Lame Shall Enter First," Sheppard enacts just such a denial of an ethic of responsibility. O'Connor herself describes how the ethic of responsibility can be felt in fiction, writing that the modern novelist-as-artist "may find in the end that instead of reflecting the image at the heart of things, he has only reflected our broken condition, and, through it, the face of the devil we are possessed by. This is a modest achievement, but perhaps a necessary one" (168). In "The Lame Shall Enter First," O'Connor does show the broken condition, the face of her devil, and something more: the story shines a light on a darkness, a hopelessness, that results from following a too-modern path, one of self-love and not fellow-love. In this way, O'Connor's critique of the social sciences (through the character of Sheppard) is as vigorous as those of critics such as Ransom and Cowley, but unlike theirs, her response grows out of a special ethic of responsibility—an ethic that is characteristic of both her understanding of the purpose of art and of her role as a Catholic artist.

O'Connor's rejection of a modernist ethic seems to have developed early and been in place by the time she graduated from Georgia State College for Women. We saw in O'Connor's letter to Hester that her dissatisfaction with the social sciences developed in those years as well. O'Connor's choice of a major of social science, then, may be surprising, but perhaps her critical views of the social science discipline developed while she was majoring in it and not before. In addition, as Brad Gooch writes, O'Connor's college plan was a "special wartime three-year program," one that, we may assume, probably

did not allow much time for frequent changes of major (83).[2] Also, philosophy classes were taught as part of the social science curriculum, possibly drawing O'Connor to the major. Gooch describes one of those philosophy courses, Social Science 412: Introduction to Modern Philosophy, as the "most important class" O'Connor took in college (112). The class was important for O'Conner because while taking it she found—or developed—a voice to counter the "secular humanist" positions of its professor, George Beiswanger (Gooch 113). Beiswanger reveals that he "took for granted the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment set the Western mind free from the benightedness of Medieval thought (from Thomas Aquinas, etc)" (qtd. in Gooch 113). (As, we may imagine, did Sheppard.) O'Connor, of course, did not share this view, nor did she rely, as Gooch writes, "on mathematics and science to unlock the secrets of a purely material world," for she did not even believe in a purely material world (113). Yet these early disputations with Beiswanger helped O'Connor develop her art in at least two important ways: first, by encouraging her to apply to his alma mater, Iowa, and second, by providing an intelligent foil against which her own positions and arguments were sharpened. Whether he intended to or not, then, Beiswanger pushed O'Connor into a direction that would lead to her developing her own voice and art, an art that would sometimes, as an act of responsibility and faith, take aim at the modernist predispositions of intellectuals and social scientists—social scientists such as Sheppard, who is brought, finally, in her story, to see clearly the limits of his modernist vision only at a terrible cost.

O'Connor's views of social science, though shaped as early in her life as her college years, developed into a mature critique by the time she wrote her late story "The Lame Shall Enter First." Another midcentury humanist, University of Chicago professor of rhetoric Richard M. Weaver, also expressed particularly grave concerns about

[2]Interestingly, Gooch also suggests that O'Connor might have switched her major in order to avoid taking two required English major courses with Dr. William T. Wynn after she made a grade of 83 in his composition course, which kept "her off the first-quarter dean's list" (93).

the professions and writings of the social scientists. In *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, Weaver dedicates a chapter to a critique of social science discourse, a topic he further addresses in a review essay, "Social Science in Excelsis." In both the book and article, he addresses several areas in which he believes social scientists fail in their writing and thinking. Weaver synthesizes, in a sense, the pernicious and pretentious practices of which humanists and other critics of the era felt social scientists guilty. O'Connor owned a copy of Weaver's *Ethics*, and so it will be particularly relevant to our discussion. In one of her last letters, O'Connor writes to Janet McKane, "Sometime at your library you might see if you could find *The Ethics of Rhetoric* by R. M. Weaver. I once had a copy but I gave it to somebody for a graduation present and now I'm sorry I did" (129). Apparently, this book made a greater impression on O'Connor than some of the books she read in her social science classes.

Weaver's critique of the social sciences and its discourse will shed light on our reading of "The Lame Shall Enter First," and O'Connor's do-gooder Sheppard. This reading will rely, in particular, on three areas of critique established by Weaver in *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. First, Weaver sees the social scientist as suffering from forms of self-deception, and I show this to be Sheppard's own primary shortcoming. This self-deception of the social scientist, as Weaver sees it, results from an equivocal understanding of language, brought about by a reluctance to distinguish between positive and dialectical meanings. I will show that Sheppard frequently fails to make this distinction himself. Such equivocality—ambiguity, vagueness—damages his relationship with his son, Norton. In his refusal to understand Norton's own suffering, Sheppard demonstrates a disregard for his own province of authority, which Weaver sees as a problem for the social scientist in general. Second, unlike the philosopher or natural scientist, Weaver insists, the social scientist is further burdened by a lack of a unified ontological base (a criticism that mirrored, at the time, those of sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, a harsh critic of his own field). For his part, in "Lame," Sheppard refuses to examine the ontological base of his own behavior; he behaves in ways which he believes are *good* or *helpful* without examining those

terms. Finally, third, Weaver suggests that the social scientist sometimes tends toward dishonest optimism; that is, he or she may look upon society as a little better off than it really is. Such a view, seeing society as eminently improvable, may cause the social scientist to look at the world through proverbial rose-colored glasses. Doing so is not in itself necessarily regrettable, but such behavior can be dangerous, as in "Lame" when Sheppard refuses to recognize, until too late, Rufus Johnson's evil characteristics.

O'Connor, advocate of the "accurate naming of the things of God," certainly shares with Weaver a belief that language use should represent the "light within," and that to use language in any other way is deceptive—an affront, to Weaver, against communication, and, to O'Connor, against God (*Collected Works* 978). Interestingly, Weaver sees the dilemma of the social scientist as one of audience understanding, and O'Connor recognizes this dilemma in regard to her own work. O'Connor, of course, regularly despaired of communicating with, not the non-specialist, but the non-religious world. In her essay, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," for example, she writes of her strategy in communicating with the unchurched: "When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs as you do, you can relax a little. . . . [W]hen you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures" (806). O'Connor's problem is that many of her readers no longer believe the way she believes; many of the readers believe, instead, as Sheppard believes.

When we first meet Sheppard, in his dialogue with his young son Norton, we begin to recognize his strongly held but ill-defined (or ungrounded) philosophy. But first, alone, O'Connor situates Sheppard in a modern setting, perhaps indicating his modern ideals. We are told that "Sheppard sat on a stool at the bar that divided the kitchen in half, eating cereal out of the individual pasteboard box it came in" (595). In this first sentence of the story, O'Connor uses the breakfast bar not only to represent the "modernness" of the house in which Sheppard lives but also to suggest the tensions in the house, for the bar *divides* the kitchen—on one side is Sheppard, and on the other,

his son. Sheppard's breakfast, too, the little box of cereal, represents modern consumer culture and the isolation it engenders; after all, the box is an *individual* serving, and one which requires a minimum of effort and certainly no community. Moreover, we are told that Sheppard eats this cereal "mechanically"; the narratorial voice attempts to check Sheppard's humanity. (595). O'Connor skillfully uses these symbols to represent Sheppard's isolation. We know that of all her fictional creations, O'Connor liked Sheppard among the least. In a letter to Cecil Dawkins, after wholly dismissing his idea that Sheppard represents Freud, O'Connor writes: "The story doesn't work because I don't know, don't sympathize, don't like Mr. Sheppard in the way that I know and like most of my other characters" (*Collected Works* 1174). Her dislike of Sheppard is clear in the story as well as in her letter.

Indeed, neither O'Connor nor Weaver could be accused of looking upon social scientists generally with much sympathy. But why should this be the case? Why does Sheppard ultimately fail to impress either Norton or Johnson with his messages, and, alternatively, why is Johnson successful in persuading Norton? Weaver's discussion of social science discourse will help us to answer these questions and to understand O'Connor's—and other midcentury critics'—attitudes toward social science. He begins his first line of inquiry by asking: "*Does the writing of the social scientists suffer from a primary equivocation?*" (187). Weaver clarifies this question by posing a further one: "Are they dealing with facts, or concepts, or evaluations, or all three?" (*Ethics* 187). Weaver believes that confusion, then, exists for the social scientist from, and even before, the moment he or she begins to write an analysis. The problem, as Weaver sees it (a problem, incidentally, which is easily recognizable in the thinking of Sheppard) is one of confusion—or simple failure to distinguish—between *positive* and *dialectical* terms. This is no small problem. Weaver reminds us that "the positive term designates something existing simply in the objective world: the chair, the tree, the farm" (*Ethics* 187). On the other hand, Weaver defines dialectical terms as those "standing for concepts which are defined by their negatives or privations," and he offers this helpful illustration: "To say that a family has an income of

$800 a year is positive [remember: his book was published in 1953]; to say that the same family is underprivileged is dialectical" (*Ethics* 188). These are the definitions that will be used to show how, in "Lame," Sheppard frequently fails to make this distinction, behaving as if his vague generalities are observable realities.

Sheppard believes that his "modern mind" is liberated from what Wordsworth once called creeds outworn, but he has failed to replace such creeds with anything but unexamined notions of "rightness," what Weaver, elsewhere, called "the 'social stew' on which the modern educationist tries to nourish the young" ("Social Science" 19). Certainly Norton is among the young who have been fed the sort of stew of ambiguity Weaver decries. Sheppard tells his son, "You've never been taught anything but the truth," distinguishing his brand of parenting from that of Rufus Johnson's fanatical grandfather, whom he believes has filled Johnson's head with false ideas (597). But Sheppard refuses to define for Norton this "truth." Unsurprisingly, his vague generalities will fail to convince Norton. Moreover, Sheppard refuses to argue in a healthy way with anyone who opposes him. For example, after Johnson tells Sheppard that his destructive behavior is the result of Satan's influence, Sheppard responds: "Rubbish. . . . We're living in the space age. You're too smart to give me an answer like that," and his anger is directed at the grandfather whose "imbecility," he believes, "could only be imagined" (601). Sheppard's responses typically fail to engage conversation; he prefers to cut off any sort of dialogue. And while Sheppard ridicules the religious fundamentalism of Johnson and his grandfather, he dedicates himself to a kind of secular religion, one which endorses the modern self as idol and science as dogma.

Sheppard's social scientific religion without religion proves inadequate to meet the insistent challenge of Johnson, as Johnson himself quickly realizes. Sheppard's language is rarely precise, rarely "true," and Johnson sees quickly through this verbal self-deception. When Johnson first steals into the Sheppard home and finds a frightened Norton, the young intruder sums up his view of Sheppard: "'Yakketty, yakketty yak,' Johnson said, 'and never says a thing . . . 'Gas . . . Gas'" (604). Though he utilizes less elegant terms, Johnson's criticism of

Sheppard resembles a portion of Weaver's critique of social science discourse. Weaver argues that the worst social science writing is mostly bankrupt in terms of content, that the social scientist's "rhetorical contortions are forms of needless hedging," often marked by an "unrelieved horror of inanity and jargon" (18). Or, as Johnson has it, nothing but *gas*.

Sheppard insists that Norton "recover" from his grief over his mother's death and believes that the boy is being "selfish." Sheppard's wife, we learn, "had been dead for over a year," and Sheppard believes that "a child's grief should not last so long" (597). Moreover, Sheppard thinks that the grief can be overcome by "helping other people" rather than "sitting around moping" (598). Sheppard has, in essence, defined "grief" as well as its "cure"; such definitions, however, are hardly exact and fail even to recognize Norton's actual emotions. We repeatedly see Sheppard insisting that his dialectical definitions are positive definitions, that there is no room for "argument." Further, Sheppard fails to actually communicate his definitions for his much-loved terms—selfish, good, patient, helpful—and, therefore, refuses even to provide grounds for healthy argument. No, for Sheppard, his ways of doing are "right," and as a consequence he does not feel the need to examine these mostly empty terms. In this way, O'Connor's Sheppard exhibits the too-vaguely defined thinking and behavior that Weaver and the humanist critics decried. Sheppard not only talks in these vaguely- defined terms; he thinks in this way as well. We read that "[a]ll he wanted for the child [Norton] was that he be good and unselfish and neither seemed likely" (595). A proponent of rationality, Sheppard nevertheless inexplicably blames his son for wrongs not yet committed. Sheppard attempts to draw Norton into sympathy with Johnson by describing the condition of the youth's life on the streets. In this instance, Sheppard does attempt to describe real details—he tells Norton that Johnson "was in an alley . . . and he had his hand in a garbage can"—but this description, buried as it is by other generalities, has little chance to make much of an effect (595). Immediately after this description, in a triumph of what Weaver called rhetorical hedging, Sheppard engages with Norton in this exchange:

> "Norton" Sheppard said, "do you have any idea what it means to share?"
>
> A flicker of attention. "Some of it's yours," Norton said.
>
> "Some of it's his," Sheppard said heavily. It was hopeless. (595)

Indeed, Sheppard may be correct: the situation does seem without hope, at least as long as Sheppard himself continues to avoid what O'Connor called accurate naming. Certainly Norton is correct in his definition of sharing—some of it is indeed *yours* as well as *his*. In his heavy correction, Sheppard is arguing the other side of the same coin, and by claiming the situation hopeless, he frees himself from the responsibility of further explanation. In this way, Sheppard exhibits another of Weaver's characteristics of the dialectical term and its users. Weaver writes that vague dialectical terms, such as "justice," "good," and "underpaid" are "positional terms" and that a writer "no sooner employs one than he is engaged in an argument" that can only be understood by "the scope of the term and its relation to its opposite" (*Ethics* 188). Sheppard denies the free exchange of language by using such terms, then refusing to see their opposites, as his discussion with Norton shows—and, thus, he is always arguing without recognizing it.

Another important point Weaver makes about the communicative failures of the social scientist is this: the social scientist's "unsatisfactory expression" can be remedied "with a clearer understanding of province and responsibility"; Weaver believes, in short, that the social scientists had over-expanded their territory through "invasions and usurpations" ("Social Science" 18). We certainly see Sheppard overextending; unable to ameliorate his own son's grief, he takes Norton on as a project. Sheppard's first responsibility should be his son, but he has managed to convince himself otherwise. Not only is Sheppard able to convince himself of his son's inferiority, he is also able to imagine Johnson capable of every good. Indeed, Sheppard's head is so full of sociological types (Norton as spoiled child; Johnson as the worthy poor) he can see neither his own child nor Rufus Johnson with any kind of clarity. When Sheppard, working as a counselor

in the reformatory, first reads Johnson's file, he is impressed above all by a representative number, the boy's high I.Q. score: "It was 140" (599). Because of this high IQ score, Sheppard determines that "Johnson was worth any amount of effort because he had the potential" (599). Of course, Sheppard does not clearly define Johnson's potential, nor recognize any direction toward which it might naturally tend. Instead, in comparing Norton and Rufus Johnson, Sheppard continues to pile up empty terms and to see the boys as sociological types. While Sheppard believes that Norton is "selfish, unresponsive, greedy . . . and average or below average," he believes that Johnson exhibits a "potential" that is hampered by "defense mechanisms," a tendency toward "senseless destruction," and a need for "compensation" (599; 608). (In Sheppard's comparison of the two boys, one is reminded of Cowley's "triumph of nouns" parade.) In the process of reducing the two boys to the status of mere instances of the generic categories he has himself already established, Sheppard clearly—and tragically—neglects his responsibilities as a parent. He convinces himself that Norton is not worth his attention and instead turns to Johnson, with whom he has no real emotional connection.

An even greater example of Sheppard's abandoning his true province of responsibility occurs when he underestimates the power Johnson exerts over Norton, a power derived in part from Johnson's strong, direct language. Sheppard cannot see the dangerous appeal of Johnson's very decided and confident use of words. Sheppard is familiar with Johnson's verbal fanaticism, for Johnson quite clearly responds to Sheppard's inquiries into the basis for the boy's behavior. Johnson tells Sheppard, "I already know why I do what I do . . . Satan . . . has me in his power" (600). Sheppard again applies sociological abstractions to the situation, believing Johnson's views are evidence of a "warping" and an "injustice" (600). Convinced that his modern notions are superior to Johnson's, Sheppard underestimates the boy's statements. But Sheppard does begin to realize Johnson cannot be molded into an image of Sheppard's own making.

Johnson's directness of language particularly affects Norton, who, accustomed as he is to his father's platitudes, finds himself unable to combat Johnson's powerful rhetoric. After Johnson steals into the

Sheppard home, he sets about correcting Norton's notions about him—notions, of course, Norton has borrowed from Sheppard. Johnson denies his own need for Sheppard's assistance and tells Norton: "I eat out of garbage cans . . . because I like to eat out of garbage cans. See?" (603). Johnson attempts to help Norton "see" straightly, a task that Sheppard has failed to achieve. Johnson then proceeds to shatter Sheppard's vaguely constructed philosophy, when Norton says of his father:

> "He's good," [Norton] mumbled. "He helps people."
> "Good!" Johnson said savagely. . . . "Listen here," he hissed, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't *right!*"
> Norton looked stunned. (604)

Norton has been powerfully confronted by Johnson, who orders him to "see" and to "listen," while he presents his own black-and-white, right-and-wrong philosophy. The power of Johnson's directness begins to persuade Norton, and Sheppard's unspecific attempts to counter Johnson's rhetoric again prove ineffectual.

While Sheppard's vague proclamations have had little effect on Norton, Johnson provides attention and hope for the young boy. Cognizant of Sheppard's verbal "gas," Johnson realizes that Norton desperately needs attention. Though Johnson does not currently consider himself a Christian, he does believe in the divinity of Christ, as well as in heaven and hell. Desperate to believe that his mother's soul exists somewhere, Norton becomes an eager audience for Johnson's Bible lessons. Sheppard, who is anxious to create a bond between himself and Johnson, is surprised to see a bond form between Johnson and Norton instead. Johnson announces: "Whoever says it ain't a hell . . . is contradicting Jesus. The dead are judged and the wicked are damned" (611). Norton is immediately transfixed by the idea that his mother, or at least her spirit, lives on someplace, anyplace. He asks Sheppard, "Is she there. . . . Is she there burning up?" (611). Sheppard, whose "compassion" rarely rouses itself for Norton's benefit, suspects "[t]he boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere" and his "pity turned to revulsion" (611). Of course,

Norton needs no pity and certainly no revulsion, but his father seems oblivious to the boy's emotional needs. Instead, he insists, "That's all I have to give you . . . the truth" (611). Accustomed to his father's empty words, Norton rejects Sheppard's notion of the truth instead and turns to Johnson for support. He repeats his question to Johnson: "Is she there. . . . Is she there burning up?" (611). Norton then insists that his mother had been a Christian, ignoring Sheppard's denials, and begs Johnson to tell him if his mother's soul exists. Johnson answers that she is "On high . . . in the sky somewhere . . . but you got to be dead to get there" (611).

Johnson's suggestion that Norton must be dead in order to be "on high" does not alarm myopic Sheppard, who is nowhere in the story a *good shepherd*. Instead, apparently unaware of the dangerous possibilities that Johnson is introducing to Norton, Sheppard continues to avoid his responsibility as a parent, choosing instead to continue his endless, irrelevant lectures. He tells the boys: "Man's going to the moon . . . is very much like the first fish crawling out of the water onto land billions and billions of years ago. . . . He had to grow his adjustments inside" (612–13). Ironically, Sheppard seems entirely incapable of adjustment. Rather, Johnson, who moves with ease from the woods, to the streets, to the Sheppard home, clearly exhibits adaptability, and he is just as easily able to place himself in Sheppard's former position of authority in Norton's mind. Continuing to discuss the subject of the afterlife, Norton asks Johnson: "When I'm dead will I go . . . where she is?" (613). O'Connor here presents a portrait of the evil Johnson (an evil that Sheppard refused to acknowledge), who begins to exert a great deal of influence over Norton. And Sheppard, who has failed to care for his son in the aftermath of his wife's death, fails again by allowing Johnson more or less free rein with his son.

It is not difficult to see the appeal of Johnson's "sermons" to Norton. Reading "Lame" in view of Weaver's discussion of social science discourse, moreover, provides further insight into Johnson's success with Norton. Weaver suggests that part of the problem of social science discourse, applied here to the behavior of Sheppard, springs from the lack of an ontological base for the discipline. Weaver insists that the less accomplished social scientist is really a

"dialectician without a dialectical basis" and that his or her jargon cannot be used with "the simple directness of the natural scientist pointing to physical factors, nor with the assurance of a philosopher who has some source for meaning in the system from which he begins his deduction" (*Ethics* 189). Certainly, O'Connor would place herself in the category created for the philosopher: her faith, strengthened by philosophical readings in Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, provides the source of meaning for her own deductions, her personal metaphysic. And this, then, is likely the primary reason O'Connor could not "know," "sympathize" with, or "like" Sheppard in the way she liked her other characters (*Collected Works* 1174). Because she viewed Sheppard as lacking an ontological basis, O'Connor fills his mouth with meaningless words and his mind with vague notions. Sheppard vainly attempts to exhibit credibility. And Johnson, though he may be "evil" in the eyes of the reader and a "genius" in Sheppard's own opinion, refuses to confirm Sheppard's credibility at all. Perhaps for this reason, Sheppard clings almost fanatically to a romanticized vision of the sciences and tries to imbue this vision in both Johnson, who ignores it, and Norton, who obsesses over the potentialities of space science.

Sheppard's continued attempts to recreate both Norton and Johnson in his own image reflect what Weaver felt was a general failure of social scientists of the era. "Social science," Weaver writes," because it has leaped to a premise of the infinite predictability and infinite manipulability of man, looks forward to some millennial reconstruction of society" ("Social Science" 18). The vision of an improved future, Weaver suspects, contaminates the vision of the social scientists, causing them to see not what is but what (ideally) will be. Again and again, Sheppard overlooks Johnson's behavior and words and sees only the boy's vaguely defined *potential*. Sheppard seems obsessive in his attempts to convince Johnson of the superiority of science over religion. But Sheppard, who is not a religious man, is a not scientist, either; he is merely someone with a passing interest in the sciences. Still, Sheppard urges the boys—primarily Johnson—to explore the sciences, particularly astronomy and rocket science. The

story's narratorial voice explains that during Sheppard's conversations with Johnson at the reformatory, "[Sheppard] roamed from simple psychology and the dodges of the human mind to astronomy and the space capsules that were whirling around the earth faster than the speed of sound" (601). And Sheppard's zealous attempts to make Johnson appreciate astronomy probably conceal Sheppard's own desire for a "rational" ontology. As Jon Lance Bacon points out, "Sheppard tries to use the allure of space exploration to distract [Johnson] from thoughts of Christ and Satan" (29). Sheppard, though, is self-deceived, and he heatedly considers what the sciences could do for Johnson. Sheppard "instinctively . . . concentrated on the stars. He wanted to give the boy something to reach for. . . . He wanted him to *see* the universe. . . . He would have given anything to put a telescope in Johnson's hands" (601). But Sheppard cannot *see* himself clearly, much less the universe; therefore, he is not at all prepared to be Johnson's guide.

When Sheppard does buy a second-hand telescope for Johnson, the boy shows no enthusiasm for the instrument. Instead, Norton develops a fascination for the telescope, and he spends hours searching the heavens for signs of his mother. Sheppard, though, continues to ignore his "mediocre" son, concentrating instead on Johnson, and "since Johnson had lost interest in the telescope, he bought a microscope. . . . If he couldn't impress the boy with immensity, he would try the infinitesimal" (617). Brinkmeyer correctly recognizes that "Sheppard buys the boys a telescope and a microscope . . . symbols of Enlightenment rationality and the scientific method" (93). Sheppard's hopes are symbolized by this shift in concentration: once Sheppard had thought he could give Johnson the world, even reaching beyond the world to space; he now settles for considerably less.

Unwilling, and perhaps even unable, to recognize the flaws inherent in his personal ontology, Sheppard remains largely oblivious to the extent to which those ontological flaws are blinding him to his parental responsibilities. Even when Sheppard learns that Norton was with Johnson when the older boy stole a Bible from a ten-cent store, Sheppard still cannot understand the situation he has created in his home, and he clings to his tired clichés. He tells Norton: "You

haven't learned to be generous but you have learned to steal" (626). Sheppard, probably not even fully aware of what he means by *generous*, seems incapable of realizing his own shortcoming: that he has not taught Norton to be generous and that Johnson has taken the trouble of teaching the neglected boy something, albeit how to steal. The episode of the stolen Bible proves to be the final rift in the Sheppard household. Sheppard hysterically engages in an argument with Johnson, insisting that the boy does not truly believe in the Bible, but Sheppard, temporarily realizing the limitation of his vague terms and philosophies, can only repeatedly insist: "You don't believe in it!" (627). Johnson then attempts to prove his sincerity by eating a page out of the stolen Bible. Sheppard, his "compassion" shattered at last, finally orders the boy out of the house.

Later that evening, Sheppard finds Norton alone at the telescope. Combining elements of Johnson's fanaticism and Sheppard's virtual religion of astronomy, Norton triumphantly announces to his father: "I've found her! [. . .] Mama! . . . She's there. . . . She waved at me!" (629). Sheppard, though, does not take seriously these developments. A few moments later, when the police bring Johnson to his door, Sheppard refuses to take any further action. Deciding his involvement with Johnson was "an honorable failure," he speaks to Johnson in "a last desperate effort to save *himself*" (630–31; emphasis added). Realizing he has deceived no one else by his platitudes, Sheppard clings desperately in their power to save, not the boy, but himself. Employing his old terms one last time, Sheppard insists that Johnson is not evil but, rather, that he is "'morally confused'" (631). Briefly, but very briefly, Sheppard believes that his "compassionate" ideology has withstood the challenge enacted by Johnson. We read that "Sheppard remained there, bent slightly like a man who has been shot but continues to stand" (631). In his attempt to restore his self confidence in his own self-deceit, though, Sheppard's comforting mantra—"I have nothing to reproach myself with . . . I did more for him than I did for my own child"—begins to ring in his ears as an accusation (631). But Sheppard has not yet learned his lesson. He, who had sought to save himself by helping Johnson, suddenly considers that Norton, instead, is "the image of his salvation" (632).

But Sheppard will be not be able to continue this deception. No, Sheppard finds Norton hanging from the attic rafters, from which the boy "had launched his flight into space, and Sheppard "reel[s] back like a man on the edge of a pit" (632). The telescope, which had once represented Sheppard's "blind" ambitions, "lay on the floor" (632). Even at this death scene, O'Connor places father and son in opposing directions, though a reader is left to wonder if Norton's "flight" will save his father from descending into the "pit."

Finally, Sheppard is left alone with his failure. The sad, ruined figure of the do-gooder social scientist suggests that O'Connor agreed with critics of the era, such as Weaver, Cowley, and Sorokin. Though "The Lame Shall Enter First" had not yet been published when Weaver wrote these words, they could easily apply to Sheppard, by the end of the story: "The more the social scientists proclaim their imminent control of affairs," Weaver wrote, "the more the world bucks, heaves, and reels. That is because the more one assures himself that he has a complete rational control of his environment, the more he diminishes his actual capacity for dealing with it" ("Social Science" 19). Sheppard, who, to his neighbors and associates, probably seems like an ideal model of the helpful citizen, but who, to O'Connor, represents something considerably less, is damned by his own attempts to play God. Even at the end, though, as Sheppard finally faces the possibility that he was failing with Rufus Johnson, he has still not recognized the inherent meaninglessness of his modern ideals. Indeed, finally recognizing his failure with Johnson, Sheppard decides that "[k]indness and patience were always called for, but he had not been firm enough" (614). "Kindness" and "patience" and "firmness," of course, are the kinds of terms which represent Sheppard's naiveté, his ineffectiveness at his professed goal of "helping other people" (598). Yet, doomed by his refusal to recognize the evil embodied in Rufus Johnson's actions, Sheppard merely attempts to respond to Johnson's "pure hatred" by "summon[ing] his compassion" (615). His compassion, however well-intentioned, proves a sorry adversary for Johnson's hatred. Fully self-deceived, Sheppard manages, instead, to accomplish nothing—and worse than nothing, his pride harms those around him. Weaver

writes that social scientists "suffer" from a "melioristic bias" (*Ethics* 195). This bias, Weaver suggests, "rests upon the assumption that man and society are improvable" (*Ethics* 197). This "assumption," of course, would seem to be an admirable one. And as we have discovered, Sheppard (as well as Rayber in *The Violent Bear it Away*) seems to have shared this assumption.

But O'Connor had no faith in the melioristic bias of the social scientists. Brinkmeyer writes that "Sheppard in a sense assumes the role of lord and master, the savior (and shepherd) of Johnson" (193). Sheppard time and again refers to his power to "save," though he turns out to be a poor "shepherd." John F. Desmond, examining O'Connor's work in light of Owen Barfield's study of idolatry, writes that O'Connor's "business as a writer . . . was to 'pulverize' the minds of her characters and readers through force" (26). In the world of "The Lame Shall Enter First," O'Connor makes clear that sociological good intentions will always be outmatched by divine force. This is a lesson O'Connor felt compelled to teach, as a duty to her faith. While Sheppard was part of the story she needed to tell, O'Connor saw herself as part of her God's story. In her prayer journal, she writes: "Don't ever let me think, dear God, that I was anything but the instrument for Your story—just like the typewriter was mine" (*Prayer Journal* 11). As an instrument of God's story, O'Connor took seriously her commitment to her art and message. Here, we may see a reason that she remarked to Dawkins that the story was not as successful as she had hoped; that is, O'Connor's own criticism of the social sciences and social scientists (like that of other humanistic critics of the era) may have been too general. Perhaps O'Connor (or Cowley or Weaver) did not know the social scientist well enough, see a large enough representation, before making their criticisms. In any case, Weaver, for his part, ends his discussion of the social scientist with a passage that likely appealed to O'Connor:

> To sum up, the melioristc bias is a deflection toward language which glosses over reality without necessarily giving us a philosophic vocabulary. One could go so far as to say such language is comparatively lacking in responsibility. . . . It carries a slight

> suggestion of denial of evil, which in ecclesiastical circles, as in some lay ones, is among the greatest heresies. (*Ethics* 200)

Certainly, O'Connor would view the denial of evil as a kind of heresy and agree with Desmond in the origin of "the new idolatry that grew out of the scientific revolution, the root of our present day idolatrous mind" (28). Unfortunately for Sheppard, he believes too long in both these heresies. Johnson sees this clearly, and when he says of Sheppard "He thinks he's Jesus Christ!" (609), O'Connor spells out the ultimate nature of Sheppard's self-deception. Desmond writes that "[t]he idolater resists . . . the repentance . . . to which O'Connor pointed when she observed that most of her characters were so hardened in their ways that *only* some shattering violence could begin to shake them" (34). The "shattering violence" in Sheppard's life is unusual in that it is not physically enacted upon himself. But Johnson's rebellion and Norton's suicide shatter his world as surely as any gun or fire or stroke would have done and—in the process—reaches to the depth of Sheppard's self-deception.

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Thomas à Kempis (1379–1471) *Imitation of Christ*

Unapologetic Goodness in Patrick Gale's *A Perfectly Good Man*

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In 2012, for the Harvard Ingersoll Lectures on Human Immortality, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's lecture was entitled "Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination." That night Morrison claimed that contemporary literature "is not interested in goodness on a large or even limited scale. When it appears, it's always with a note of apology in its hand. . . . [Contemporary] authors are masters at exposing the frailty, the pointlessness and the comedy of goodness" (36:39, 36:00). She further stated that "goodness in contemporary literature seems always to be equated with weakness, as pitiful, sort of like a little girl running frightened and helpless through the woods while the pursuing villain gets more of our attention than her savior" (26:15). She went on to contend that the counterpart to goodness—evil—is easier to write about and that she has "been confounded by how attractive it is to others, and stunned by the attention given to its every whisper, its every shout. Evil has a blockbuster audience; goodness lurks backstage. Evil has vivid speech; goodness bites its tongue" (24:50, 26:43). Good and evil are among the greatest forces in this world, so the way they are handled in fiction is indeed significant. Therefore, when Morrison argues in

her Harvard lecture that literature, at least contemporary literature, has done goodness a disservice, her point is worth considering.

I would argue that there are multiple contemporary novels which explore goodness, particularly in connection with faith—and even its counterpart doubt—without portraying those who are good as weak, helpless, or dull. Drawn to fiction about ministers and their struggles with faith, I have written articles about Elizabeth Strout's Reverend Tyler Caskie in *Abide With Me* (2006), Haven Kimmel's Reverend Amos Townsend in *The Solace of Leaving Early* (2002) and *The Used World* (2007), and would also mention Father Walter Gower in Gail Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991), Brother Michael Christopher in Tim Farrington's *The Monk Downstairs* (2002), and Reverend John Ames in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (2004), all of whom could be said to represent goodness in contemporary fiction even in the midst of crises in their faith, crises which actually lead to demonstrations of courage and strength. More recently, British author Patrick Gale could also be offered up as an exception to what Morrison saw as a trend in modern literature. In his novel *A Perfectly Good Man* (2012), published the same year as Morrison's lecture, Gale introduces Father Barnaby Johnson, a priest in the Church of England, who closely follows the teaching of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. Similar to Kimmel's and Strout's ministers, Johnson struggles with his own failings, doubts, and loss of faith, so goodness in Gale's novel is not equated with perfection though the novel's title can give readers pause. Goodness, in fact, does not require *human* perfection in the Christian realm; à Kempis repeatedly reminds followers of Christ that though they should strive for righteousness, humans are imperfect, sin can be forgiven, and belief can overcome doubt.

I plan to analyze the relevance of the à Kempis quote Gale uses as his prologue: "All perfection in this life hath some imperfection bound up with it; and no knowledge of ours is without some darkness." Darkness exists in this world, and it can be in the form of common or ordinary sins (moral failings), or in what some would call evil, as in deliberate and willful desires to cause harm to others. à Kempis, however, allows for the possibility of human imperfection

in perfection, which might seem like an impossible contradiction unless one understands the concept of justification and sanctification. The title of Gale's novel, *A Perfectly Good Man*, could be read in two ways: Barnaby as indeed perfect in his goodness, with no moral failings, or as what novelist Sally Vickers sees as an example of "peculiarly English irony, implying a quality of goodness that falls far short of perfection and yet, at the same time, is acceptably sufficient." What Vickers describes as "English irony," I see as a sufficient goodness based on theology. I will examine the nature of Barnaby's "goodness," both perfect and imperfect, his failure to apply the reflections about imperfection in *Imitation* in the aftermath of personal moral failure, the way that failure contributes to Barnaby's crisis in faith, as well as the way that his goodness ironically provokes resentment, jealousy, and even active evil in others. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the novel indeed models a "perfectly good" man and illustrates that evil is formidable but does not ultimately triumph.

Goodness in Patrick Gale's novel is intrinsically connected with religious faith, perhaps expectedly so since the main character is a Church of England priest. As already mentioned, Toni Morrison believes goodness is difficult to write, and many others say the same about faith. In Paul Elie's well known article "Has Fiction Lost Its Faith," he asks the question "Where has the novel of belief gone," and mentions that the "refusal to grant belief any explanatory power shows purity and toughness on the writer's part . . . [or it] may show that the writer realizes just how hard it is to make belief believable." Randy Boyagoda in an article for *First Things* entitled "Faith in Fiction" claims,

> While religion significantly matters in minor literary texts today . . . serious literary fiction largely occupies its very own naked public square, shorn of any reference to religiously informed understandings of who and what and wherefrom we are, which represents a marked break from centuries of literary production informed by Christian beliefs, traditions, and culture.

Thus, Gale goes against the perceived current by writing convincingly and believably about both goodness and faith though he does admit that he encountered initial doubt and concern on the part of his publishers who asked him to keep God out of the title when they realized he was writing about a priest. He told Nicola Barranger in an interview that "Religion scared them; . . . their instinct was that it wasn't a commercial subject" and that it would be a 'hard sell' with a priest as subject and 'deeply unfashionable.'" Gale, whose father and grandfather were both priests, continued by saying,

> Faith is a color I bring into a lot of my novels. And I treat the faith in the broadest sense so although he is a Church of England priest, the faith in the book is much more personal than that. I actively avoided showing many scenes actually involving liturgy and church practice. It's far more about our day to day faith and the role faith plays in the lives of people who don't think themselves believers but people who are in a crisis.

Thus, Gale has no religious agenda; instead, faith in the novel is the natural, and ordinary, result of his own encounters with faith. He says, "I find the residue of my childhood faith seems to be stitched into the fabric of my being and I can't ever quite unpick it" (Barranger). As a result, Gale writes of a character with whose nature he is familiar, admitting that he was "partly inspired by family example," claiming, "My father's religious belief, profound but extremely discreetly expressed, was one of the inspirations for the book" (Author Website). Consequently, Gale's fictional priest is a complex man of faith, a man of imperfectly perfect goodness.

Barnaby Johnson's goodness is a recurring theme in *A Perfectly Good Man*—a theme that runs from the title itself throughout the narrative that sometimes runs chronologically backward, at least in Barnaby's chapters. The novel opens late in Barnaby's years of ministry, with his administering extreme unction for a young man, Lenny Barnes, who is in the process of committing suicide, a young man who, unbeknownst to Lenny himself and to the reader at that point, is Barnaby's son. As the novel unfolds, we only learn gradually

about Barnaby's prior loss of faith, occurring at the time of the boy's conception, a faith he ironically regains after the boy's death, which occurs in the first chapter. Along the way we see Barnaby's role as a minister, husband and father, working backward through his life, until the final chapter, set when Barnaby is eight years old and the seeds of his faith are sown. During that final chapter, we realize that a desire to be good, or at least no trouble, actually precedes Barnaby's faith: his beloved Uncle Jim pleads with the young boy, "Please don't feel you always have to be *good*. Sometimes you're so good it hurts to watch you" (Gale, *Perfectly Good* 403). We do not, however, need to rely for evidence of his goodness on his uncle's claim alone because earlier that day, Barnaby is encouraged by Uncle Jim's secretary to go swimming in his underpants since he brought no bathing suit after being told not to by his father's employee cum girlfriend, and the narrator says about the young boy, "He was never bad. His role was to be as unobtrusive and as little bother to anyone as possible" (391). Then later in the afternoon, when Uncle Jim reveals to his brother, Barnaby's father, that he is not only seriously unwell but has squandered the family inheritance and will have to sell the 400 year old family estate and most of the possessions, all of which Barnaby should have eventually inherited, Barnaby is the only one of the family who seems to be thinking about the most significant part of Jim's revelation. He tells his uncle, "I don't want you to die. It's not fair. . . . I don't care about the house. . . . It's only stuff. I care about *you*" (401, 403). Barnaby's kindheartedness is evident at this early age, and it is further developed as a result of his religious faith and calling.

Decades after the chronological moments of the final chapter, but much earlier in the novel, when asked by Lenny Barnes during confirmation class what had made Barnaby become a priest, Barnaby shares, "I was drawn in by, well, mystery, I suppose. And by people who showed kindness when they didn't have to" (270). His response is typical of the way Gale handles religious faith in the novel, with a very light hand. Because of the way the narrative of the novel is structured, not only chronologically backward in the case of Barnaby's chapters but with rotating narrative viewpoints, we only touch down

at seven distinct points throughout Barnaby's life. Chapters have titles such as "Barnaby at 60" (the first of Barnaby's viewpoints by an omniscient narrator), "Barnaby at 52," "Barnaby at 40," "Barnaby at 29," "Barnaby at 21," "Barnaby at 16," and finally "Barnaby at 8," so we see him at certain milestones in his life and have to infer much about the intervening years. Any further details we discover about him are presented in the other characters' chapters, which, intriguingly *unlike* Barnaby's, move forward in time as the characters age. Therefore, when Barnaby mentions "mystery" and being "drawn in by kindness," we are sure only of one instance—that involving his Uncle James the same afternoon as previously mentioned. Barnaby's father is vehemently antireligious, teaching Barnaby and his sister, Alice, that "God was sentimental nonsense, a primitive myth we had long outgrown, but man was glorious" (395). Uncle James, however, gives Barnaby permission that afternoon to believe otherwise, telling him, "[W]e're not alone." "God, you mean?" Barnaby asks, and his uncle replies, "Of course. Call it what you will. I look at a flower like that, or those birds swooping over the grass. And I know everything is going to be all right. All will be well" (403). Barnaby leaves Uncle James that afternoon, dwelling on "the distinct possibility of God, who, having been nowhere and nothing when they set out that morning, suddenly seemed to be glowing out from every surface and every idea" (404). Uncle James giving Barnaby permission to believe in a benevolent presence to comfort him is all the more significant because Barnaby's father and his female companion, Mrs. Buttercluck, are horrible, compassionless parental figures who seem to have no clue how to raise children. When Barnaby's beloved older sister is murdered while he is in boarding school, his father simply sends a notification letter to him which is so cold and blunt in nature that the headmaster is prompted to say about it, "This is unspeakable" (310). This is the environment in which the sensitive child Barnaby has been planted and who grows in the opposite direction of his father toward kindness, compassion, and faith.

We read about Barnaby's role as husband, father, and priest as the novel moves backward in time, and we see overt mentions of his

goodness more in other characters' chapters than in his own. Other people function as mirrors that reflect Barnaby's goodness. When, for example, Modest Carlsson, the representation of evil in the novel, initially visits the young Barnaby's first congregation, he comments on the young priest's "vulnerability . . . his laying himself wide open to mockery" and the way he "radiated an innocent certainty. His was the unquestioning belief of a child, like belief in Father Christmas, or fairies, or a mother's beauty or a father's love. This was belief that compelled one to fall in with it and follow because to do otherwise would be a kind of cruelty" (73, 74). Another parishioner, Patience Boyle, herself described as "[b]itter in outlook and acid of tongue," "regale[s] the newcomer Modest with unflattering portraits of every member of the congregation. All were found to be hypocrites in some way or other, neither as sweet nor as pious as they appeared. . . . Only young Mr Johnson was spared her judgement. 'Anyone can see he's the real thing. Far too good for us to hold on to him for long'" (77). When Barnaby moves on to another congregation, his former parishioners consider what they have lost and what they are looking for in their next priest but realize they "could hardly list 'worryingly trusting' in the Parish Statement of Wishes" (81). Thus, those who look to Barnaby as a spiritual guide are convinced of his goodness and find his faith credible and persuasive.

Of course, the image one projects to outsiders cannot always be assumed to be genuine, but it is difficult to deceive one's own family; therefore, it is revealing to consider the way Barnaby's family perceives him. Barnaby's wife, Dorothy, can perhaps be trusted even more than his parishioners to comment reliably on his vocation as a minister and approach to ministry. After ten years of marriage to Barnaby, she claims to love his sermons, which she suspects are "relatively simple," but which

> had the effect of gently opening that text out so that she found herself understanding it better, or feeling a better identification with it. . . . His sermons were never long and sometimes they were very short indeed but involved significant pauses in which he directed everyone to think about or imagine something before

> he continued. He was, she came to realize, unlike most priests in his use of silence. (103, 104)

She also comments on the fact that even though it causes conflict in the Parochial Church Council, "[h]e was strongly against missionaries who sought to convert people away from an existing religion" (104). Therefore, Dorothy is a respectful witness to Barnaby's integrity in ministry and the fact that he prefers to point out a possible path of faith rather than trying to drag others down it.

As for Barnaby's children, at the age of eleven, an age when parental dissatisfaction might typically set in, his daughter Carrie describes her father as "mild rather than disapproving and, if he changed people's behavior, her own included, it was always by displaying disappointment rather than anger" (134). She also comments on the variety of books he reads, more than just "God books," and attributes it to the fact that "he was interested in everything, prepared to give everyone a fair hearing" (136). His adopted Vietnamese son Jim/Phuc is so aware of his father's goodness that at twelve years old he bases his image of God on Barnaby: "As for Dad, he was love itself. . . . When someone mentioned God to Jim, he saw only his own father" (209). Even later, when this adopted son has rejected his parents, reclaimed his Vietnamese name of Phuc, stolen from his parents, desecrated his father's church, and gone eight years without contacting them, he still says of his father when Barnaby is implicated in Lenny Barnes's suicide,

> It was so entirely like Barnaby not to defend himself independently but to trust in honesty and the law to do it for him. It would have been a comfort to take refuge in cynicism, to assume that he relished the unexpected opportunity for a kind of martyrdom. But Phuc knew that was not how it was, that Barnaby's impulses . . . stemmed entirely from the good. (347)

What he knows of his father is unconditional love and his father's refusal to condemn or reject him even when Phuc rejects his own family. Barnaby's response instead is to write "to him thereafter,

every week, not e-mails, which he had learnt could so easily be blocked or deleted, but proper ink and paper letters, which could be reread and saved, and stack[ed] up to form a physical proof of love" (83). In those letters, Barnaby shares his authentic self, making "an effort to be entirely himself on paper, entirely honest," even to the point of mentioning his own religious doubts and referring to his own broken boyhood relationship with his father, saying, "I don't want that to happen with you and me, Phuc. In fact I won't let it happen" (83). Furthermore, Barnaby honors his son's wishes by using his son's (challenging) birth name rather than the one he and Dorothy had given him when they rescued him from a Vietnamese orphanage and brought him to Cornwall. There is not a single incident in the novel when either of his children or a parishioner describes him in any terms other than good. Unless, of course, one counts the sarcastic and profane claim Nuala Barnes uses in describing Barnaby (and his possible hypocrisy) after their son's death (328).

It's a bit ironic, or apt depending on how one reads her tone, that Nuala Barnes resentfully refers to Barnaby's apparent goodness in the most exaggerated and profane way possible because she, of all people, knows that Barnaby is not completely without sin. She and Dorothy are the only other people in the novel, at least until Modest Carlsson's tragic discovery of the secret, who know that Barnaby commits adultery in his thirties. This secret brings back to mind the Thomas à Kempis quote I previously mentioned that Gale chose for his prologue: "All perfection in this life hath some imperfection bound up with it; and no knowledge of ours is without some darkness." At a point in his marriage when he and Dorothy (who has become "Dot" to him now, to her annoyance) have drifted apart and no longer have sexual relations, he meets Nuala Barnes in a vulnerable moment, inadvertently courtesy of Modest Carlsson and his interference in Barnaby's life. During their second meeting, "the devil was in her so she reached up and took him by the lapels of his jacket, which he didn't resist, and kissed him" (200). Thus begins a short lived affair (only five encounters) that abruptly ends when she becomes pregnant. Knowing he is married, not telling him about the pregnancy, she begins hiding from him when he comes to visit,

and he eventually gives up. When she accidentally runs into him several months later and he asks if he is the father, she tells him he is, that it is a boy, and he then offers to ask his wife for a divorce, an offer Nuala refuses. Not only that, but she threatens him that if he tells Dot, she will "just vanish" (206). If Barnaby keeps her secret, he will be able to see and know his son, just not "as a father" (207). So Barnaby is not without "sin," not morally perfect, as many around him assume. Even Nuala, just after they have had sexual relations for the first time, jokingly asks him, "Was that the wickedest thing you've ever done?" and when he sighs heavily, she says, "Oh, God, . . . [w]as it the only wicked thing you've ever done?," a question he does not answer (201). This "wicked" thing casts a shadow on his goodness, though only he, Dot (he confesses his adultery to her), and Nuala know about it, at least until after Lenny's death. It precipitates Barnaby's loss of faith, a crisis he endures, ultimately not because he is imperfect, not because he sins, but because he loses his belief in the theology he follows, in the form of a little red book that he carries with him everywhere.

One of the first things Dorothy notices about Barnaby when they meet is "that he always carried a tiny, red, Victorian book and seemed to read it when alone or waiting" (28), a book that his daughter Carrie observes as a child "was always in his pocket" (135). He told her it "was his best friend but a best friend whose appeal nobody else quite understood" (135). The book is ironically (considering what follows) what first brings him and Nuala Barnes together the rainy night she slams on the brakes because she sees him on the side of the road, weeping, searching among the "brambles and ferns," looking for what he has lost, the book that "had become like a talisman"—Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*—which he had dropped while on a walk (194, 197). This book has special meaning to him because it was the last gift his beloved sister Alice purchased for and inscribed to him, a gift her friend found and sent to him after Alice's rape and murder in Khartoum.

The Imitation of Christ, written anonymously in the 1400s but generally attributed to à Kempis, is considered a classic Christian devotional and has been revered throughout time. George Eliot, for

example, mentions it in her novel *The Mill on the Floss* when Maggie Tulliver finds it on a window-shelf, picks up "the little, old, clumsy book," and starts skimming. "A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read. . . . Here then, was a secret of life; . . . here was insight, and strength, and conquest to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme Teacher was waiting to be heard" (Book 4:3). She then embarks on a path of self-renunciation which will ultimately lead to her sacrificing her life in an attempt to rescue her estranged brother in a flood. The devotional is said to have been what Dietrich Bonhoeffer was reading the night before the Nazis put him to death. The introduction to the Penguin edition says, "Noted for its Biblicism, the *Imitatio's* ideas often appear only to be adaptations of biblical texts" and a footnote claims that it contains over 1,000 scriptural references throughout the four separate books that were joined into one devotional (xvii). Therefore, reading and following the guidance of *The Imitation of Christ* would be akin to following scriptural directives. Since Barnaby reads the devotional constantly throughout his life, it can be assumed that the book is more than just a treasured, sentimental possession but one that he uses as a guide for his life.

There is an emphasis in the devotional on following Christ's example in resisting sin. Barnaby would surely have been familiar with the warnings about temptation, especially of a sexual nature, and how to prevent it from leading to sin. Book One is entitled "Advice Helpful to the Spiritual Life" and has several chapters about avoidance and resistance, about obedience, all which contain suggestions for living what the author considered a successful Christian life: "Avoid undue familiarity with the opposite sex, but commend all good women to God" (15); "But the greatest, and indeed the biggest, obstacle to our advance is that we are not free from our passions and lusts" (18); "It is hard to give up old habits and harder still to conquer our own wills. But if you cannot triumph in small and easy things, how can you succeed in big things?" (19); "Often we do not know what we can tolerate, but temptation reveals our true nature. . . . At the start of temptation we have to be especially on our guard, for the Enemy can be more easily overcome if he is unable to

open the door to our minds. He must be refused entry as soon as he knocks. Hence the saying: 'Resist from the beginning; the medicine may not arrive in time'" (21); and "Nothing in the world, nor affection for anyone, can justify doing evil" (24).

It is no surprise, then, that when Barnaby succumbs to temptation and has a brief affair with Nuala that results in a son he cannot acknowledge, he is plunged into guilt. Unfortunately, it is a guilt that is much longer lasting than the affair itself. We are told that "[f]or some years after his affair, Barnaby descended into a self-made hell. This began straightforwardly and predictable enough with guilt at what he had done and shock that something blundered into with such giddy thoughtfulness should have such an irreversible effect" (117). He confesses his adultery to Dot, who eventually forgives him and even manages to put a positive spin on it since "she could see that it probably made him a better priest, having discovered he was no less an animal than other men" (117). Thus, his ongoing guilt is not the result of her attitude toward him but because he cannot, or will not, tell her about the child: "The omission lodged like a deep splinter in his spirit and festered there" (117). His guilt and other factors in his life such as Jim's increasing withdrawal from the family lead to something unfortunate for any believer, but especially for a priest: he loses his faith.

> It began as something even worse [than a loss of faith], a sense that yes, God was still there but had ceased to listen or even to care, not to others, just to him; an exclusive withholding of attention, interest, mercy, an idea he would once have thought as impossible as water flowing uphill, and almost sacrilegious. . . . But then, on one especially drab February Sunday, . . . his faith left him entirely, midway through his reading of the Gospel. It happened so abruptly it was almost a physical change, like the flicking off of a light, and he hesitated in his reading. God wasn't listening because God wasn't there. . . . It was like a fairground ride Jim had persuaded them all onto once, a kind of revolving circular room where the floor slowly fell away from under one's feet but centrifugal force held one stupefied in place

> against its whirling walls. Faith fell away and, surprise surprise, the world didn't end. Everything simply lost its meaning and savour and people looked increasingly dull and stupid. (118)

What is so painful at this point is that Barnaby suffers from the guilt of his sin, his imperfection, likely as a result of simple moral expectations for himself, but even more likely, because of his religious beliefs, which are reinforced in his devotional book. Unfortunately, he does not remember the consolation of the chapters that assure readers that all of us fail, all sin, but that there is a remedy; thus, we need not despair. His focus is on the fact that, having sinned, he has drifted so far from the concept of obedience and has forgotten the part of the prayer that refers to the remedy for disobedience ("just men made perfect"), and in that moment of crisis, he ceases to believe that God even exists (15–16).

When Barnaby initially tries to resign as a result of his crisis of faith, his archdeacon will not accept, attempting to encourage him instead by saying, "no parish priest is worth their salt who isn't constantly questioning the value of what we do," and the archdeacon, remembering Barnaby's devotion to à Kempis, prescribes a closer study, along with the practical suggestion of a visit to his GP in case Barnaby is suffering from depression (119). A closer study of à Kempis should have been a consolation to Barnaby since the devotional repeatedly acknowledges the weakness of human nature: "Even someone with firm determination often encounters failure. . . . However hard we try, we shall still fail too easily in many things" (30); "I have never found anyone, be it a Religious or a devout person, who has not sometimes experienced a withdrawal of grace or felt a loss of devotion. And no Saint has ever lived, however entranced and enlightened, who did not suffer temptation sooner or later. For those who have never suffered some trials for God's sake are not worthy of the heavenly contemplation" (67). Further, there is hope even when one fails and forgiveness that restores one to relationship with God:

> Be of good heart and prepare yourself to endure greater trials. All is not lost, however often you feel tempted or deeply troubled.

> You are not God, after all, just human, not even an Angel. How can you expect to remain in a constant state of virtue, when this was not even possible for an Angel of heaven, nor for the first person in the Garden? I am He who grants healing and safety to those in distress, and I lift up to My divinity those who acknowledge their weakness. (222–23)

Thus, it is clear that the devotional book Barnaby uses as his touchstone offers relief, not condemnation, in the face of succumbing to temptation, yet it fails to restore his "evaporated faith" (89).

What is a priest without faith? How can he continue to proclaim what he no longer believes? Like the Reverend Tyler Caskey in Elizabeth Strout's novel *Abide With Me* and the Reverend Amos Townsend in Haven Kimmel's novels, Barnaby continues to attempt to minister to his parishioners, even though "he felt a fraud and a hypocrite, especially when he preached, which he began to do as little as he could" (120). We discover, however, that even a doubting priest, a priest whose goodness takes over in wanting to help others even when his own faith is failing, can be a help to others. Barnaby is another "wounded healer" like Kimmel's Amos Townsend; continuing to minister without faith, in both cases, strictly for the sake of caring for others, takes enormous strength. When Lenny Barnes, the boy whose conception sets in motion Barnaby's loss of faith, comes for confirmation classes at the age of fourteen and expresses doubts about what to believe, Barnaby reassures him by saying, "Nobody believes all of it all the time, however hard they try. . . . Doubt is good. Doubt shows that your powers of reasoning aren't suspended. It gives your choice its value. . . . What matters is what you've learned and that you'll know the church will remain there for you whenever you need it. Perhaps you'll be in desperate need" (268).

Rather than being suspicious of or unconvinced by a priest who can live with doubt, Lenny finds Barnaby's response even more persuasive. When he asks Barnaby about why he became a priest and Barnaby struggles to supply an answer, Lenny's thought is that Barnaby's "struggle to express something words couldn't seem to cover was more convincing than any smooth theology" (270). Even more

poignant, when Barnaby instructs Lenny about the sacraments and Lenny asks about extreme unction and whether or not it works, Barnaby replies, "Does it work? I hope so. It's a comfort. It's a beautiful prayer," and we already know from the opening chapter of the novel that six years after that conversation Lenny calls Father Barnaby to be a witness to his suicide (271). On that day, prompted by the priest's prayer asking that Lenny's soul "may be presented pure and without spot," Lenny dies, thinking of the sheets on his mother's washing line, "Pure. White. Without spot" (16). For twenty years, Barnaby ministers faithfully without the consolation of his own faith, and it is, ironically, not until after Lenny's death that Barnaby regains it.

Typical of the way Gale handles faith in this novel, subtly rather than overtly, we are told that "losing Len had restored his faith," but not exactly *how* it happened (383). We have to pay close attention to discover what happened to him. The prayer that the priest offers for his dying son refers to the forgiveness of sin, of being considered pure before God, perfect, without stain:

> I humbly commend the soul of this thy servant, our dear brother Lenny, into thy hands as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour: most humbly beseeching thee, that it may be precious in thy sight. . . . Wash it we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate lamb, that was slain to take away the sins of the world; that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world, through the lusts of the flesh, or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before thee. (15–16)

During the prayer, Lenny notes not only that Barnaby is crying but that "It wasn't like a prayer in church. It was like an important conversation with someone in the room. Someone else" (15). Barnaby is not just going through the motions in this moment. He is actually beseeching God and calling on "the most merciful Saviour" to cleanse Lenny's soul. We know Barnaby prays in this moment as a believer and not as one without faith because of what he says later at

the inquest: "I do know I can pray for a dying man's eternal soul and I am confident that prayer will offer comfort to the dying and will be heard with kindness by God" (51). This is in contrast to the "I hope so" response he had given Lenny six years earlier and is an indication of his restored faith even if he believes he can no longer be a priest and finally retires from the ministry after his son's death. Barnaby is indeed a good man who sins and even loses his faith yet continues in faithful ministry until his faith returns.

Goodness is admirable, but it often annoys other people. Characters in this novel appreciate Barnaby's goodness, but when they think of it in terms of his being "perfectly" good, it stirs up resentment. Why is that? Is it jealousy? Envy? Why would we resent someone else's virtues? Why do we sometimes experience *schadenfreude* when someone else stumbles in life? My theory is that it has to do with our perception of ourselves and the way we measure our own behavior against someone else's. If another is more virtuous, behaves more selflessly, then what does that say about us? If we look at the people in the novel who mention Barnaby's goodness, it is interesting to see that several of those same individuals are affected negatively by his responses to them. His adopted son, who thinks of Barnaby in terms of pure love, cannot handle his father's forgiving nature because he obviously thinks he deserves condemnation: "The more Barnaby forgave him, the worse Phuc felt—until he simply had to make contact impossible" (340). Of course, Phuc feels much the same way about his sister Carrie who, he says, "never said a word in judgement about the things I did," but then when asked, "But how did that make you feel, . . . about yourself," responds, "Dirty. . . . Worthless" (360).

Similarly when Carrie meets the woman who will eventually become her partner, she asks her, "Was your dad a priest?" and Morwenna replies, "No, . . . just a very good person"; Carrie responds, "Ah! You have my deepest sympathy. Mine's a vicar. It's not always easy" (287). As I mentioned previously, it is after the inquest following Lenny's suicide that Nuala Barnes comments sarcastically on Barnaby's goodness by revealing to Modest Carlsson that Barnaby was Lenny's father: "He never said a word [during the inquest]. I thought it was so obvious. I thought everyone would see how alike they were.

But of course he was a priest so it's the last thing anyone would. . . . Even at the inquest. He was so [obscenity] *good*, wasn't he? He didn't even perjure himself in order to keep his promise. He just didn't quite say it all" (328). Thus, even though Barnaby was keeping her secret as she had asked, she seemingly resents the fact that his "sin" remains undiscovered and that he maintains a (mis)perception of absolute purity. She later, however, admits that her anger toward Barnaby was actually because Lenny requested that the priest be present at the moment of his death rather than her. Additionally, one reviewer of the novel, Charlotte Hobson, is put off by Barnaby's nature, admitting, "I found myself on occasion waiting for Father Barnaby to fall from grace," thus sharing Modest Carlsson's expectation throughout the novel of discovering Barnaby's imperfections. Even Gale himself has admitted, "I could so easily have written a novel about Dot. I love her and care about her and have far more patience with her, really, than with her rather hopeless husband" (Author Website). What Gale does do, however, is counterbalance the goodness in Barnaby with evil in the character of Modest Carlsson.

In her comments for the Ingersoll Lecture, Toni Morrison contended that "thinking about goodness implies, indeed requires, a view of its opposite" (24:31). As if in agreement with Morrison, Gale, in discussing the formation of his novel, explains the reason for Modest's behavior:

> There's a saying that virtue writes white, and I knew from very early on that I'd need some sin in the mix, something a bit nasty, to avoid the risk of blandness or piety. So Modest came about because I needed someone who passed for good but who only the reader would not be fooled by. I needed to give the devil a voice. And, true to tradition, the devil sang rather well and loudly! . . . But basically Modest's role is to make us think about virtue, and the difference between seeming virtue and the real thing. (Author Website)

Modest Carlsson is a character who poses as someone who is good but meanwhile is plotting destruction, hovering around the edges of

Barnaby's life, waiting patiently for signs of a flaw, and hoping to unmask him. He serves as the face of sinister hypocrisy in the novel, which, it seems to me, works to restrain readers from accusing Barnaby of hypocrisy during his years of faith-less service to the church. Barnaby means well throughout his life, but Modest deliberately chooses to do wrong and to deceive. He makes a mistake in midlife that causes him to lose his career, his family, and his good name, but after serving time in prison he has the opportunity, and means, to change his life for the better. Instead he deliberately embarks on a life of appearing to be good, while pursuing evil. Modest brings to mind Flannery O'Connor's letter in which she advises a friend about revising her work in progress:

> But I think you can't just posit a moral moron and expect the reader to have any interest. If there is no possibility for change in a character, we have no interest in him. You wouldn't write a story about someone hopelessly insane. I think you could correct this by having the boy not quite so evil, by having him hesitate before each of his evil acts and decide on the evil for a reason, which he figures out. Otherwise there is no use to write about him. You've got to show him killing the little bit of good in himself. . . . Let him be a monster because he wants to be a monster, not just because he is a monster. He seems to me evil but not sinful. Sin is interesting but evil is not. Sin is the result of an individual's free choice, but evil is something else. (199)

As though following O'Connor's directive, Gale creates Modest not as evil incarnate but as someone the reader actually initially pities as he succumbs to the temptation of a relationship with one of his students and ruins his life as a result. In prison, his only comfort is in the form of books and food, "of which he ate all he could until he appeared the demon of everyone's imaginings" (59). After being released from prison, he takes on a new identity and rather than trying to take care of himself and blend back in to society, he seems to intentionally make himself as disgusting as possible. My view, however, is that the reaction he receives from others is less because of his

obesity, as he perceives, but because of his confrontational, disingenuous manner, which others respond to negatively, often without even consciously knowing why. Regardless, the outcome is that "[f]ree to move among people once more, he became sharply aware that he was noticed only for the brief registering of disgust. At least disgust involved notice" (63). So Modest begins the practice of forcing others to notice him, forcing sales clerks, for example, to have to meet his eye as his unpleasant way of confronting others, rather than trying to make connections in sincerity and kindness:

> Smiles, he learned, were a challenge less easily ducked than a mere verbal pleasantry. To smile at someone, especially a stranger, was somehow to assume more superiority until the smile was returned. When he smiled at someone and said a bright good morning to them and they did neither in return, he felt rewarded by a brief flush of angry satisfaction that he was the better person. (63)

Modest projects his own repugnance regarding his physical appearance onto others and then assumes the mask of goodness in order to subtly antagonize them and set them up in such a way as to validate his belief that he is a victim. We know from the narrative description that Modest is self-aware and deliberately chooses his path:

> He had no illusions about expecting love. He had experienced love and had thrown it away and that kind of true, trusting affectation surely only came to each man once. . . . He had no such expectations because he knew he was repellent. . . . What he hungered for was . . . significance, he realized: to play a role in people's lives again and know that his decisions and actions affected others. (63–64)

In his "hunger," both physical and emotional, he turns to food and alcohol, perhaps unsurprisingly; but, more surprising, we are also told, to Jesus, at least for a time. In the years following his release from prison, he finds a New Testament in his search for books for his used bookshop, reads the entire book, and even begins to dream

of Jesus. Even more significantly, it is at this point that he is beaten in the street by a group of sailors and is helped by a priest who discovers him, a priest who gives him his own handkerchief to staunch his nosebleed, and who, in a parting gesture of consolation as the police and ambulance arrive tells him, "God watches you, Modest. All will be well" (70). It is a ministering encounter that changes not only Modest's life but that of the young priest as well, a young Barnaby Johnson, and it is not a change for the good.

Modest becomes obsessed with the kindness of the priest whose only identifier to him is the initials on the handkerchief, and he goes in search of the man who was good to him, visiting church after church until he finds him. Modest has a choice at this point, a choice to follow the example of his rescuer, to pursue goodness. When he hears Barnaby preach for the first time, the priest's voice "filled him with an unsettling desire to confess all and be absolved" (74). Instead, however, he revels in the "small thrill of transgression" he experiences as he unworthily takes communion, even wondering as Barnaby tells him, "Christ died for you," "Did he know, somehow, the deception being practiced against him?" (75). Modest bypasses the path of redemption and chooses to reject the proffered grace. The narrator reveals, "It didn't work, of course, this difficult magic, lovely thought the idea was. He became no better. He regarded his fellow men with no more forgiveness and accorded the women around him no more respect. The wand of lovingkindness was waved and he was no different for it" (79).

Instead Modest aligns himself with the one member of the congregation who, he realizes, is the

> parish burden; prickly, difficult, a source of guilt to the kinder souls who failed to love her. And that in turn led him to see how effortlessly he might become such a burden too, unloved, unlovable, yet ineluctably among them, like a moist, secretive toad. And how all around might continue to be repelled and to turn aside yet God and this young man, his vulnerable avatar, were compelled repeatedly to forgive and welcome him. (79)

At a crossroad of either choosing a path of goodness and following the Jesus he had encountered in his reading of the New Testament, and the example of Jesus' follower, Barnaby Johnson, or continuing on his path of self victimization, Modest not only decides to continue cultivating his outsider status but even more deviously, does it under cover of becoming a "regular reader of lessons and taker of collections; [therefore] . . . he was almost respectable again. Outwardly, at least" (80). In other words, he wears a mask of goodness, but is a deceiver, a hypocrite. Remaining in the church affords him the opportunity to "compel" Barnaby to accept him, the thought of which delights Modest because of his growing fascination with the priest. His obsession is curbed only when Barnaby leaves his first parish and disappear from Modest's life.

In a novel where unfortunate random occurrences sometimes have dire consequences, it is eleven years later when Modest accidentally encounters Barnaby in London, thus awakening "an old hunger" and pursues—or perhaps stalks might be a more appropriate word—Barnaby to Pendeen where he is then serving (170). What motivates Modest is his inability to conceive how anyone could be as good as Barnaby appears to be. He slithers around the priest for years, waiting to discover some moral failing, "some sweet evidence of imperfection," "itch[ing] to find a fault in him, even a small one, . . . but Johnson's grace never wavered" (179, 172, 173). Modest even obsesses over the tiny red book Barnaby carries with him everywhere, wondering what the secret of its significance is:

> The more often he saw the little book in his hands or being tucked out of sight, the more convinced he became of its profound significance to him. It was surely the key to his maddening strength or, better still, the text that would reveal his hidden faults. Whatever, it was plainly a book he needed by him always, like a beloved friend, and that was reason enough to want to take it from him. (173)

In yet another of those random occurrences, when Modest goes out for a walk on his 55th birthday, he sees Barnaby walking on the path

ahead of him, and when Barnaby unknowingly drops the book, Modest picks it up and hurries away with it, thus precipitating the moment when Nuala finds Barnaby weeping in the rain, searching for the beloved copy of the à Kempis book that his sister had given him. Modest tries to read the devotional but finding it "phonily antique" and "quite unreadable" tears it up and burns it (178). He not only remains untouched by the time he spends regularly hearing the gospel proclaimed in countless church services, but his dissembling nature also motivates him to do whatever he can to annoy or torment Barnaby. Little does he know, and how overjoyed he would be if he did know, that his theft of the book ultimately leads to the conception of Barnaby's son with Nuala, an act that is Barnaby's chief moral failing.

It is goodness of any sort that Modest hates, but he cannot stay away from it either; it is as if he is transfixed by what he refuses to be (as opposed to *unable* to be), resenting any kind of faithfulness that he encounters in others. Even Barnaby's daughter Carrie thinks of Modest as

> the ogre of her childhood, the monster it was somehow forbidden to name as such, blighter of otherwise happy occasions by his mere presence. . . . He was one of those people . . . who seemed energized by other people's suffering, who seemed to swell with the diminishing of others and to grow more lively with a death. Yet there was nothing one could point to directly and he forestalled any criticism by good behavior. . . . The things he said or gestures he made towards others in such circumstances could not be faulted, but, for Carrie, were always undermined by his tangible excitement, like a dog's at the shedding of blood or a cat's at the fluttering of an injured bird. (300–01)

Modest Carlsson is the spectre of willful evil in the novel, seen in stark contrast to the "perfectly good" Father Barnaby, a contrast Modest both relishes and resents. Still, if Modest were only set up as a foil, then reviewer Lucy Clark's criticism might be more persuasive: she claims that Modest "appears to have been added to the line-up to play evil to Barnaby's good, and while he injects a bit of menace, as a

nemesis he fails to convince." I completely disagree because I think Gale reveals Modest's thought processes and motivations in such a way that his carefully tended resentment of another's goodness is completely believable, partly because we see how it develops, and even frightening when one considers his gleeful joy over the prospect of causing others pain.

Ironically, it is Nuala Barnes who unknowingly hands Modest the treasure he has been searching for throughout the thirty-six years he has known Barnaby—evidence of Barnaby's imperfection, "the plump, nutritious proof of Johnson's fallibility and fundamental ordinariness"—when she, in her moment of anger after the death of her son, reveals to Modest the affair of twenty years previous (329). It is here when evil intentions reach their pinnacle because in yet another unfortunate random occurrence, as Modest leaves Nuala's home, "walking with more riches than he could safely carry," he encounters Dorothy, Barnaby's innocent wife (329). Even steadfast Dorothy has drawn Modest's resentment:

> Dorothy had eluded him until now, secure in her quiet sense of position, her deep roots in the place and the evident affection in which she was held by the parish. . . . But when he saw her a terrible idea took shape and acquired direction when she ducked up the lane that led to the church. (331)

Following her into the church, he devises a way to reveal that Lenny Barnes was Barnaby's son in a way typical of him, framed as a means of admiring her: "Dorothy, you've been so amazing. Standing by all this time, not speaking out even when the likeliness between father and son was so clear to everybody" (334).

Gale has created a character so aware of his own evil by this point in his life that he actually brings Shakespeare's Iago to mind, perhaps the most evil fictional character ever created. As if Modest's revelation is not horrifying enough, as Dorothy collapses in shock, "having some sort of attack," we are told that he "would love to have found such murderous presence of mind, to have watched, perhaps even taking a seat in a pew alongside Dorothy, talking half-audible horrors

as she slipped away" (334). He is so despicable that he is now beyond redemption, and evil has done its work in the novel through him. He is only thwarted from causing further damage to Barnaby and the community when Tabby, the new rector, subtly reveals to him that she knows his true identity as a sex offender. The only mercy here is that Barnaby does not know the role Modest played in his wife's death and will not have to live with the guilt of her discovering his lie of omission about Lenny Barnes in the final moments of her life.

The author Ian Buruma says in the "By the Book" column in *The New York Times Book Review* that "villains are always more appealing. It is hard to write about a good person without making him or her look like a bore." It seems to me that Patrick Gale's novel proves just the opposite. Barnaby Johnson is a good man who is all too aware of, and distressed by, his imperfections, which to my mind helps to qualify him as a "perfectly good" man who is admirable. Yes, his strongest impulses are toward goodness and kindness, but rather than his being boring or even unrealistic as a result, he instead develops as a complicated man who struggles with very real, damaging failings and a crisis of faith. Yet in the midst of his doubt, all too aware of his own sin, he musters the strength to be faithful to his congregation and continue to pursue goodness, becoming a powerful moral example to readers of Gale's novel as well. By including a "villain," Gale does not create a more interesting, more appealing character as an antidote for a character of saccharine goodness; instead, Modest Carlsson's deliberate and carefully considered choice to be "evil" demonstrates the weakness, and horror, of self-serving evil and the ultimate strength of selflessness in a world where both options are constantly available. The novel brings to mind Christopher Beha's comment about Marilynne Robinson:

> [H]er novels serve as a reminder that belief in another reality does not protect us from the challenges of living in this one. While belief may answer certain fundamental questions, it raises others, particularly the question of how to reconcile the demands of faith with the demands of the mundane world. This is the question that gives Robinson's novels their power. Her characters are all

> fundamentally good people who struggle with how to live in a fallen world. (158)

Robinson herself weighed in on the aspect of goodness in fiction when Michelle Huneven asked her in an interview, "[W]hat were the challenges in writing about a religious man, a good man?" She responded,

> I had no problem writing about a religious man. . . . I know good characters are supposed to be uninteresting. That must be a very recent discovery. There are plenty of good people in literature. For one thing, they make reliable and scrupulous narrators. For another, they convey ethical and emotional nuance. . . . If the word "good" implies narrowness, judgmentalism or hypocrisy, then "good" has become a synonym for "bad," nothing a writer would wish to explore sympathetically. But if goodness implies the attempt to be a positive presence in the world, a good father or mother, a good friend, or simply an honest human being—that requires a great deal of sensitivity and attention, as everyone knows who has tried it. People are not good statically. They are good situationally. They can fail at any moment, and they know it. And they usually know when they do fail, because they want to know. This is a very active and complex experience of consciousness. Self-seeking is dull and monistic by comparison.

Therefore, Robinson argues that good and evil are the result of choice and that goodness requires discipline. In opposition to the idea that evil is more appealing, Patrick Gale states that "[w]ickedness is relatively straightforward. . . . It's usually no more than a giving-in to appetite—for money, for sex, for power—so requires less strength than its opposite" (Author Website). Gale is indeed a contemporary author is who "interested in goodness," yet is realistic about its limits, all while refusing to deny the forces of evil (Morrison 36:39). Reverend Barnaby Johnson is a "perfectly good" man whose ultimate knowledge of himself does include the darkness mentioned in à Kempis's quote: he strives, he fails, he doubts, yet he ultimately

accepts forgiveness and regains his faith. He overcomes, whereas evil is ultimately silenced.

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Lazarus 2.0

Lazarus, who surely never dared
to lay his head
on a pillow
and close his eyes again.
–Laura Kasischke

Wrong. At first, that's all he did—that, and staring at the wall. Then he took to wandering. Chasing the wind and the mist. Riding his motorcycle with no helmet. Eating undercooked lamb. (What was the worst that could happen?) He couldn't see right, his eyes seared with afterimage. He stopped children on the road, searching their faces. He lingered in rooms where people had died, asked to hold people's babies. He kept glimpsing things from the corners of his eyes. The words got stuck in his mouth, as if in a second language, as if overrun by some distant music. He gathered leaves. He turned towards birds like a homesick ghost.

–Darlene Young

A woodblock print portraying Chiyo-ni and her most famous haiku, as she discovered her water bucket entangled in morning glory vines, by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861).

Chiyo-ni: Seeking Suchness

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At the time of her death in 1775, Chiyo-ni was Japan's most renowned living poet of haiku, leaving behind nearly 1000 haiku, more than any other woman of premodern Japan (Ueda 38). In Japan, October 2 has been declared Chiyoni Ki, or the Chiyo-ni Memorial Day. A memorial shrine, dedicated to her, exists in her home region of Kaga. Chiyo-ni stands out in Japanese culture as a woman who surpassed the social structure of her time with her patently influential verse. Despite this prominence, Western literary circles, in general, are unfamiliar with her talent and distinction, and few English-speaking scholars have delved into her work. For example, Haruo Shirane's 2002 anthology, *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900*, made no mention of Chiyo-ni or her haiku in the anthology's collection of Japanese poetry, but he included the work of many of her male contemporaries. The penultimate haiku poet of the Pre-Modern era, second only to Bashō, appeared as a mere side note. Shirane included Chiyo-ni in an appendix, on a list of "Other Haiku Poets and Haibun." This auxiliary list included several outdated texts from the 1950s and 1960s, including three works by Reginald H. Blyth. Shirane's most current

reference in his 2002 anthology is a 1996 text written by Patricia Donegan, *Chiyo-ni: Woman Haiku Master*. With this seminal text, Donegan has become the principal English-speaking researcher and collector of Chiyo-ni's work. Practically all other English sources of information about Chiyo-ni that were produced or published after 1996 refer to Donegan's text. It contains a comprehensive collection of Chiyo-ni's haiku intermingled with biographical findings. Donegan's publisher lists her as "a faculty member of East-West poetics at Naropa University under Allen Ginsberg and Chögyam Trungpa; a student of Japanese haiku master Seishi Yamaguchi; and a Fulbright scholar to Japan. She is a meditation teacher, the poetry editor for *Kyoto Journal*, and a member of the Haiku Society of America" (*Patricia Donegan*). Not only has Donegan successfully revived interest in Chiyo-ni in the Western world, she has also—with the interpretive assistance of Yoshie Ishibashi—revealed the significant, feminist nature of many of Chiyo-ni's haiku.

Makoto Ueda, Professor Emeritus of Japanese Literature at Stanford University, should also be recognized for including Chiyo-ni in his articles, interviews, and most notably, his book, *Far Beyond the Field: Haiku by Japanese Women* (2003). His many texts have made Japanese literature, especially haiku, more accessible to the English reader. Hopefully this trend will continue and more readers will find value in the delicate, yet powerful, poetry of Chiyo-ni.

The Uncharacteristic Life of Chiyo-ni

Chiyo-ni was born in humble circumstances in Matto, Kaga Province, in 1703, near the coast of the Sea of Japan. During her life, she was known by the following names: Fukuda Chiyo-ni ("Ni" meaning nun, which was her name after she became a Buddhist nun at the age of fifty-two), Chiyojo ("Jo" meaning woman, which was often added to designate a poetess), and Kaga no Chiyo, (meaning Chiyo from Kaga, her birth place). Her father was a picture framer by trade, and taught her the art of mounting paintings and drawings on scrolls and screens, a craft that she continued to pursue after her father's death. Chiyo-ni mastered calligraphy, painting, and scroll-making at

an early age, while helping her father with the family business. Despite their class, Kaga no Chiyo must have had parents who provided some sort of education, as she wrote the following haiku at the age of six or seven:

In my garden
starflowers bloom
come and see
(Bowman)

By the age of twelve, she was being trained, regularly, by the students of the most famous Haiku poet, Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) (Bowman). Such early exposure and training were not common for one of her class and gender at that time. When she was sixteen, Kaga no Chiyo met a haiku master, Kagami Shikō, a student of Bashō, and her life took a turn. Shikō "visited her house and wrote renku with her and other local poets. Immediately he recognized her talent, and his lavish praise launched her on a productive career as a poet" (Ueda 38). It was very unlikely that a teenage girl from Kaga would become a respected member of the Japanese literary world, yet her name and poems were well-known throughout Japan by the time she was seventeen.

Chiyo-ni's extraordinary youth led to a lifestyle that was uncharacteristic for a common girl in eighteenth century Japan. Instead of pursuing a life as a traditional wife and mother, she traveled and pursued her art. There is an unconfirmed notion that Kaga no Chiyo was married around the age of eighteen to the servant of a samurai and that they had a son. Donegan offered a possible context for the uncertainty of Chiyo-ni's marriage: "It is unclear whether Chiyo-ni ever married. In her day a woman was expected to marry; if she didn't marry, some of the reports of her married life were probably meant to explain some of her haiku which show experience with romance" (31).

After her alleged engagement, it is supposed that Chiyo-ni wrote the following:

will it be bitter or not—
the first time
I pick a persimmon
(Reichhold 13)

The persimmon is a thought-provoking choice to compare to marriage and its subsequent sexual expectations. A persimmon is very bitter when it is green, but as it ripens and reddens it becomes sweeter and more delectable. In Japanese culture, the persimmon is associated with fall and represents a ripening or transformation. The fruit is often served at New Year's celebrations. Chiyo-ni's poem articulates hope that if it is bitter at first, her life with her husband will ripen and sweeten over time. However, if she had ever been married, by the age of twenty-seven she was widowed and childless, as both her husband and her son died prematurely. Her son would have died first, after which she purportedly wrote the following heartbreaking haiku:

dragonfly hunter
how far has he traveled
today I wonder?
(Reichhold 13)

A slightly different translation by Kenneth Rexroth and Ikuko Atsumi is included in *Women Poets of Japan* (1977):

My hunter of dragonflies
How far
has he wandered today?
(53)

This second translation is slightly more personal, starting with the possessive *My hunter of dragonflies*. The simple addition of "my" deepens the level of the author's longing for her dragonfly hunter. The following haiku is assumed to be written after the death of her husband:

No more waiting
for the evening or the dawn—

touching the old clothes
(Reichhold 13)

This poem described the emptiness felt when a loved one is no longer present; the previous necessity for schedules and clothing is no longer essential. Donegan suggests that this poem is an indication "that before she became a nun she also knew the pains of love" (115). According to one historical account, Chiyojo (the name by which she would have been known at that time) returned home to Kaga and was encouraged by the Fukuoka family to marry her husband's younger brother, which would have been customary (Donegan 32). Ordinarily a widowed and childless Japanese woman would desire marriage and more children. Surely, there would have been many men who would desire marriage with such a popular and highly-cultured woman, but Chiyojo never married again. She wrote of the risk of marriage:

A vow from a summer evening
is frightening—
frost on the bridge
(Donegan 203)

The word she chose for vow, *chigiri*, refers to a "lover's vow" (Donegan 203). This poem suggests a romantic image of lovers declaring their devotion on a sultry, summer night, juxtaposed with a treacherous frozen bridge. A frosty bridge is unlikely on a summer evening, but it represents the risky and unpredictable notion of a life-long vow to a lover. It must be noted that alternate translations and interpretations of her poetry and unverifiable historical accounts of her life add to the interest and mystique of Chiyo-ni.

While still in her twenties, Chiyo-ni traveled to Kyoto and other cities on the eastern side of Japan to visit with other haiku poets (Donegan 32–33). Her increased contact with other circles only extended her popularity across Japan (Donegan 33). Focused on the minute details of nature and life, she sought after a harmony of nature and humanity. Ueda opined that the early influence of Shikō, a devoted follower of Bashō, was "unfortunate" as her earlier work was

"often presenting stereotyped sentiments in banal diction," but after years of dedication and collaboration with other poets, she "acquired a sensuous appreciation of people and their problems, which had been rare in the previous haiku tradition" (xxii).

In 1726, when she would have been only twenty-three years old, Chiyo-ni and a female friend, Shisenjo, wrote renku together (Donegan 246). Shisenjo's record of this interaction with Chiyo-ni, found in the *The Princess Ceremony*, 1726 (*Himenoshiki*), gives the reader a glimpse into the lives and thoughts of these two women:

> The distant sound of a bell is heard. It's a cloudy day in April, 1726. We are enjoying the green leaves, resting from our needlework. Chiyo-ni is visiting me. Since she and I have poles in the same "haiku stream" we wanted to write a *renku* of linked verse about the *hototogisu* [cuckoo], so we went in search of "the first sound of the cloud" (bird in the cloud). After we wrote it, we dedicated our *renku* to the statue of Maya-Bujin (Mother of Buddha) at Gyozenju temple at Naru, which is known as a women's temple, for assuring safe childbirth. (Qtd. in Donegan 246)

Their renku was painted on a scroll that hung in Gyozenji temple at Naru, to which they had dedicated their work (Donegan 246). This temple is a significant place, to which many women travel and pray for the safe delivery of their unborn children. Among their thirty-six linked poems, a few stand out. This poem, by Shisenjo, was received with a response from Chiyojo:

Daffodils
Brilliantly
in bloom
~Shisenjo

Lesson of love
whispered
in the ear of a horse
~Chiyojo
(Donegan 250)

In the context of the women's temple and childbirth, these poems describe beautiful, graceful women, round with child, as daffodils in bloom. They have unspoken concerns and desires, which are only shared with a trusted, voiceless friend, like a loyal horse. The editor of *Himenoshiki*, Toro, commented in his preface, "[A]fter reading it, I felt a deep sense of *yūgen*, which is like falling petals, or the beauty of falling maple leaves. Each haiku was exquisite like gold or jade" (qtd. in Donegan 246). The Japanese aesthetic term *yūgen* refers to a mindfulness that is subtly manifested in simple beauty.

For both men and women, like Toro and Donegan, the heightened awareness or inexplicable understanding that is sparked by the words of Chiyo-ni have inspired them to share her work with the world. Her poetry displayed a cognizance of life's experiences on a personal level that Bashō seldom if ever touched. "Her own life was that of the haikai poets who made their lives and the world they lived in one with themselves," as was the trend of the Bashō Revivalists, who sought to imitate and revive the simple style of haiku for which Bashō was known (Donegan 38).

The aging Chiyojo desired to fully embrace the path of Zen, and to be one with the natural world. Thus, near the age of fifty-two, Chiyojo passed the family framing business down to a younger relative and became a Buddhist nun. She then changed her name to Chiyo-ni or Soen, a pen-name meaning "Simple garden" (Donegan 38). Jane Hirschfield notes that Chiyojo's reason for becoming a nun was "not, she said, in order to renounce the world, but as a way to teach her heart to be like the clear water which flows night and day" (160). She was free to dedicate her time to practice her faith and her craft, writing hundreds of haiku. In 1764, a collection of 546 of her haiku was published, *Chiyoni kushū* (Ueda 38). In 1771, three years before her death, an additional collection of 327 haiku were published, entitled *Matsu no koe* (meaning "the voice of the pine") (38). Although Chiyo-ni was considered part of the Bashō Revival movement, which was mostly focused on a disconnected observation of nature, she had developed her own distinctive style of haiku, through which she often revealed a woman's viewpoint in Japanese society.

Second only to Bashō, Chiyo-ni enjoyed great celebrity during the Edo era of Japanese history. In fact, "so high was her reputation nationally that the lord of Kaga (Ishikawa Prefecture), her province, commissioned her in 1763 to make fifteen fans and six hanging scrolls with her poems written on them; they were to be included with the shogun's gifts to envoys from Korea" (Ueda 37). Poetry was often displayed in a visually artistic combination of painting and calligraphy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Chiyo-ni's Plum Blossom Haiku (Donegan 107)

Makoto Ueda explained: "Traditionally in East Asia the 'three perfections' of calligraphy, painting, and poetry were considered *one* art, and Chiyo-ni excelled in all. For the Japanese, the visual/spatial effect of calligraphy is almost as important as the meaning" (50). The visual combination of the written text was just as important as the words, which would be placed alongside simple imagery. This haiku calligraphy, or *haiga*, was a unique display of the individuality of the artist. Stephen Addiss explained that "it is believed in East Asia that all calligraphy is a direct representation of the inner character and spirit of the calligrapher (13). Chiyo-ni would have learned this trifecta of art while working for her father, framing artwork. In addition to publicly displayed scrolls and fans, her poems were featured in nearly every haiku anthology published in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Ueda 37). It was a peaceful time in Japan, when culture and education were highly revered. By the turn of the nineteenth century, nearly eighty-five percent of males could read, and there were over 120 haiku circles in Edo, the great Japanese capital that would one day become Tokyo (*Japan: Memoirs*).

Women and Haiku

During that same period, a smaller percentage of women were being educated, and they had formed their own haiku circles. According to Ueda, these women poets, who were most likely influenced by the success of Chiyo-ni, enriched the art of haiku immensely:

> Compared with haiku written by men, the world of women's haiku is just as rich and colorful, and slightly more lyrical and erotic. Because haiku traditionally tended to shun strong passion and romantic love, to explore those areas was to go counter to established tradition, yet some women poets consciously or subconsciously did so, there by helping to expand the world of haiku. (ix)

A newly educated population of Japan demanded books, and over time the volume of publishing increased exponentially to fill the

nearly 500 bookstores of Edo, most of which would have offered the works of Chiyo-ni (*Japan: Memoirs*).

Despite the significant fame Chiyo-no achieved during the eighteenth century, her work was increasingly overlooked or disparaged in the twentieth century, with her poetry coming "under scathing attack from both scholars and practicing poets" (Ueda 37). Eminent male Japanese scholars such as Takahama Kyoshi (1874–1959) and Ebara Taizō (1894–1948) considered her work to be pompous and pretentious. Taizō went so far as to state that "it goes without saying that she should be considered less than a third-rate poet" (qtd. in Ueda 37). Fortunately, in recent decades there has been a significant reconsideration of the worth of her work, especially in haiku circles. As Ueda points out, "there is a trend in favor of reevaluating her work by paying more attention to the poems that were less popular in pre-modern times (37). Many of Chiyo-ni's well-known haiku, like her most famous morning glory poem, focus on Zen and nature. However, in the less well known verse of Chiyo-ni, one can detect an additional dimension of female sensitivity and cultural commentary, which is especially evident when compared to the one-dimensional, nature-focused haiku of Bashō.

Since haiku was originally a male-dominated genre, historically few females were considered capable of producing worthy haiku. In fact, there was a customary Confucian maxim that was commonly upheld in Japanese society that boys and girls over the age of seven should not sit together (Ueda xv). The involvement of women in the affairs of men was to be limited to the serving of refreshments; artistic collaboration was frowned upon. Rexroth explains that "women were oppressed under a misinterpretation of Buddhism and were taught the Confucian virtue of smothering the feminine ego" (175). Haiku, or its predecessor renku, was a leisurely activity during which a circle of men would create an amusing linked verse or poetic dialogue. Ueda points out that "the two oldest anthologies of haiku and renku, *Chikuba kyōginshū* (Mad verse of youth, 1499 A.D.) and *Inu tsukuba shū* (The dog Tsukuba collection, 1514 A.D.), do not ascribe authorship, but it is highly unlikely that they include any work by women, for they are loaded with coarse, crude,

even obscene verses" (xvi). Women, on the other hand, were expected to create tanka, a more refined, thirty-one-syllable verse form that was typically performed by "noblewomen who served at the imperial court in the ninth and tenth centuries" (xv). While renku and haiku were created in gatherings, tanka was composed in isolation. The following heart-breaking verse is an example of tanka, written by a prominent poet, Lady Ise (875–939):

my body
wasted by winter
if only I like fields burned over
had hope for spring
(Reichhold 2)

Over the next 300 years, haiku would evolve into a more respectable form of literature. Nearly a century later, the poetry of one married woman was included in *Enoko shū* (the Puppy collection, 1633) (Ueda xvi). This anthology contained haiku written by 178 members of the Teimon School, the earliest known school dedicated to the creation of haiku. The only female poet included in the collection was identified as *Mitsusada's wife*. 177 men to one woman obviously represents prejudicial odds. Ueda explains that this "statistic, and her being listed under her husband's name, suggests the kind of status to which women were confined in haiku circles during this seminal period" (xvi). He points out that in the latter half of the seventeenth century, other female poets paved the way for women, like Chiyo-ni: "By 1684, there had emerged a sufficient number of female haiku poets to enable Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693 A.D.), a renowned writer of fiction as well as haikai, to compile *Haikai nyokasen* (Thirty-six haiku poetesses)" (xvi–xvii). Ueda further notes that of the thirty-six poets, eleven lived in agricultural regions, four were courtesans (or high-class prostitutes), three were chambermaids, three were nuns, and one was a concubine. He also suggests that Saikaku's anthology was motivated "more out of his interest in women than out of respect for their poetry" (xvii). Thirty-six poets compared to the hundreds of male poets of the day is quite a daunting disparity.

Bashō has been quoted as saying that one should "never befriend a woman who writes haiku. Don't take her either as a teacher or as a student. . . . In general, men should associate with women only for the sake of securing an heir" (qtd. in Ueda xiii). However, this comment was contradictory to his actions, as Bashō would teach and commune with female poets quite frequently. Astonishingly, even in the twentieth century, the exclusion of women from haiku circles was sustained by scholars. The English author, Reginald Horace Blythe (1898-1964), is credited with raising awareness of Zen philosophy and Japanese haiku in the English-speaking world, following World War II. He generalized that "haiku poetesses are only fifth class" (qtd. in Ueda xiii). Even more recently, such bias was held by the distinguished haiku poet Katō Shūson (1905–1993). A female guest once asked if she could participate in his haiku group. Shūson responded, "Instead of writing haiku or doing anything else, a young lady like you should try to get happily married. Find a husband, struggle with pots and pans in the kitchen, have children. Giving birth to haiku after going through all that—why, those would be true haiku" (qtd. in Ueda xiv). Despite the sustained male domination of haiku, the talent of Chiyo-ni allowed her to persevere beyond the patriarchal attitudes and expectations of premodern Japanese society to become a revered poet. A comparison of Bashō's poetry to that of Chiyo-ni will clarify why she has been recognized in recent decades for the feminist aspects of her poetry.

Comparisons of the poetry of Chiyo-ni and Bashō

To effectively create haiku, one must be able to create an image, a scene, or an impression using very few words. To facilitate the meaning of a poem, haiku poets often referenced customary figures, symbols, or fables. Typically, traditional haiku referenced the seasons and the signs of change. Particular animals and plants indicated which season was being observed. Addiss shares the following illustrations: "To give just a few of many possible examples, frogs, swallows, warblers, the hazy moon, late frost, and plum- or cherry-blossoms are all indicators of spring" (2). One of the more common

symbols, among many, is the Japanese plum. Bashō wrote of the plum blossom, as it heralds the coming of spring. He wrote the following three haiku:

Spring air—
Woven moon
And plum scent

With plum blossom scent
this sudden sun emerges
along a mountain trail

Searching storehouse eaves
rapt in plum blossom smell
the mosquito hums
("A Selection of Matsuo Basho's Haiku"; hereafter refered to as Selection)

Bashō's poems portray brief moments of life when the sights, smells, and sounds of nature announce the presence of spring. This style of poetry, for which Bashō is so famous, revels in the details of the seasons of nature, like insects, plants, and the sun and moon:

Spring rain
Leaking through the roof
Dripping from the wasps' nest
(Selection)

With few words a clear image is created. The following poem by Chiyo-ni contrasts the plum to a yuki-onna (snow woman), which was a legendary Japanese folk figure of a beautiful and ghostly woman who only appeared during snow:

Plum flower scent—
Where has the snow woman's
Ghost blown to?
(Donegan 106)

According to Donegan, the snow woman was said to seduce her victims, after which the victim would die (106). The image of the snow woman is one of enchantment, sexuality, and terror. However, the plum blossom, which would often bloom while snow still lay on the ground, was believed to offer protection from evil (Kansas). In this haiku the delicate, fragrant, and shielding plum flower is juxtaposed with the wicked, frightening snow woman in her white kimono. Both are powerful and beautiful, but the enchantment of the plum blossom will prevail over the snow woman. Spring will conquer winter, year after year. For the Japanese, who have a late spring, the plum blossom is a welcomed sight and a sign of impending relief from the cold of winter. On another level, this poem could also be suggesting that the magnificence and resilience of nature is superior to the power of a seductive woman whose beauty cannot be renewed year after year. Although Bashō's poignant poems of spring are enticing to the senses, they are antiseptic and impersonal. Chiyo-ni's poetry often includes some sort of human interaction with a question or an emotion, while Bashō's style is a mere detached observation.

Flowers, trees, and butterflies were frequent subjects of the haiku for both Bashō and Chiyo-ni. Bashō wrote the following haiku about butterflies:

Butterflies flit…
that is all, amid the field
of sunlight
(Selection)

Donegan points out that the butterfly was frequently used a symbol of women in Asian culture (114). One might wonder if Bashō is referring to an actual butterfly or to a woman. The majority of workers in fields and rice paddies would have been women. Perhaps Bashō was comparing women, working mindlessly in the fields, to a butterfly that flits aimlessly in the sun. If that is the case, then his poem is not very sympathetic to the drudgery that the women working in the field must endure in the heat of the sun. However, based on Bashō's style of disconnected observance, it seems likely that he is

referring to a literal butterfly that freely flutters in the field, unencumbered by concern, having no expectations or a need to do anything else. The butterfly is unlike a bird that must sing, build nests, and raise young. Perhaps Bashō, following the Buddhist tradition, sought to be free of the worldly concerns of everyday life, as is a beautiful butterfly. In *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women* (1995), Jane Hirshfield notes the following explanation by D. T. Suzuki that "when beauty is expressed in terms of Buddhism, it is a form of self-enjoyment of the suchness of things. Flowers are flowers, mountains are mountains, I sit here, you stand there, and the world goes on from eternity to eternity, this is the suchness of things" (160).

Chiyo-ni embraced this concept of "suchness" in her most famous poem about a vining morning glory. Apparently, one early summer day, Chiyo-ni went to fetch water from a well, but her bucket had become entangled in a morning glory vine. She did not wish to disturb the morning glory. In awe of the fast growing and stunning morning glory, she merely uttered "Oh, the morning glory!" (Hirshfield 160). Subsequently, she wrote what is arguably the most famous haiku ever written:

The morning glory!
It has taken the well bucket
I must seek elsewhere for water
(160)

Chiyo-ni could not alter the morning glory's position for her own selfish need of water, so she had to find another way to draw water. Another translation of this same poem adds a bit of additional meaning:

my well bucket
taken by the morning glory—
this borrowed water
(Ueda 39)

Chiyo-ni acknowledges the permanent aspect of nature compared to her own temporary presence within it. Her presence is felt in this poem. She must alter her own course, so as not to alter the morning glory's position around the bucket. All things are merely borrowed from the earth: air, water, and life. This is an acceptance of the "suchness" of the world. Bashō also wrote this less famous poem:

morning glories
bloom, securing the gate
in the old fence
(Selection)

Bashō is not present; he was merely observing a service that was being provided by the wild vines of the morning glory as its tangled vines assisted with the guarding of the rickety gate or fence. This haiku appears incomplete, as if there needs to be more information to fully understand Bashō's thoughts about the morning glory.

It is possible that these haiku were accompanied by other stanzas or additional haiku written at the same time. Poets would sit in circles and write together and create a dialogic discourse with one another. One of Bashō's butterfly themed poems seems as if it is addressed to someone in particular:

Wake, butterfly –
It's late, we've miles
to go together
(Selection)

Perhaps Bashō was traveling with a female companion at the time when this poem was written. Even if the butterfly, mentioned here, is a female, the meaning is very literal. He is simply prodding someone to wake for a journey, perhaps an intellectual journey.

In comparison, notice the depth of meaning in Chiyo-ni's poem. "Chiyo-ni frequently used this [butterfly] image to create delicate, sensual feeling" (Donegan 114):

butterfly
in front and back
of the woman's path
(114)

The word for path chosen by Chiyo-ni, *michi*, "could be literal as well as figurative as a life path" (114). In a literal sense, this poem could merely refer to a path on which a woman walks, escorted by butterflies. On a deeper level, this poem could also refer to generations of women, those that have gone before, and those that are yet to be born. On the path of life, we are influenced by our predecessors, the women who have mothered and nurtured us. In adulthood we are concerned for the children that will follow and the legacy we will leave. Chiyo-ni had no living children, but her legacy is her poetry, which has paved the way for other female writers, and thus she is a butterfly in front of today's female haiku poet on her path of life.

Chiyo-ni wrote other poems that spoke of the passing on of life, knowledge, and energy from one entity to another:

One hundred gourds
attached
to a single stem
(Reichhold 10)

This verse seems more literal and focuses more on the natural reproduction and sustenance of life. This particular poem is thought to have been written "in response to a Zen Master of the Eihieji Temple who asked her about the Buddhist teaching that ten thousand meanings can come from one thought" (Reichhold 10). However, Hirshfield's translation is a bit different and more all-encompassing:

From the mind
of a single, long vine
one hundred opening lives
(163)

With this verse, the reader considers more than gourds or plants, but the "opening of lives," and the phrase takes on a more human aspect, possibly human lives, or human minds. There is a notion here that the ideas that propagate from one mind to other minds can be revolutionary, changing many lives. Although Chiyo-ni was taught by the students of Bashō and embraced his style, her poetry took on a grace and inimitability that is exclusively her own. Chiyo-ni would have considered herself one of the fruits of Bashō's intellectual vine, and perhaps some female haiku poets of today consider themselves the fruit of the vine that was cultivated by Chiyo-ni.

Though Bashō displayed some consideration for women, Chiyo-ni's haiku often displayed a cognizance of the internal as well as the external struggles of women. Bashō observed an old woman, then wrote the following haiku:

now I see her face
the old woman, abandoned
the moon her only companion
(Selection)

Bashō's words appear sympathetic toward a woman that the reader can only know as lonely and old, possibly widowed and riddled with age. Bashō only noticed her face and her lack of companionship; he made no comment about her possible feelings. He also portrayed a domestic scene of a woman working in her kitchen:

Wrapping dumplings in
bamboo leaves, with one finger
she tidies her hair
(Selection)

Bashō playfully described a woman's ability to multi-task. While preparing food, she still managed to maintain the tidiness of her hair. This poem is a nod to the societal expectations that were and are placed on women to feed and care for others while maintaining their feminine beauty. In contrast, Chiyo-ni wrote with a more empathetic voice.

airing out the kimonos
as well as her heart
is never enough
(Donegan 139)

Kimonos as well as blankets, books, and scrolls were aired out seasonally to avoid dust, mildew, and the infestation of insects (Donegan 139). Bashō would have simply noted the physical act of a woman airing out her kimono, but Chiyo-ni saw the external as well as the internal grief or turmoil that a woman cannot just air out—her inability to refresh her saddened heart. Donegan explains that "there is a subtext of frustration, probably stemming from the suppression of women in Edo society" (139). The woman described in the haiku is permanently scarred, never to be renewed.

In another haiku, Chiyo-ni made a similar but more insightful observation about the circumstances of women in pre-modern Japan:

again the women
come to the fields
with unkempt hair
(Donegan 148)

Donegan points out that "this haiku depicts women too busy in the rice fields every day to worry about the beauty of their hair." (148) A woman's hair was important in Japanese culture. Ornamental combs, ribbons, and bands were expected. Different hair styles represented one's social class and status. Jeffrey Hays explains the significance of the various hairstyles in Japanese culture: "The Osafune hairstyle, with the hair sticking out and pointing down like insect antennas was worn by fashionable wives or mistresses. The butterfly-like hyogo was worn by courtesans. Girls wore their hair like geishas in a hairstyle called Momoware" pulled back in a large bun shape. Hays continues, "Unmarried women wore a shimada mage hairstyle" with squared off sections at the sides and a top-middle section pulled back. Women who did not have the time or means to care for their hair were certainly at a disadvantage. Chiyo-ni expressed sorrow for

these pitiable, hard-working women, faced with daily labor in the fields. This poem offers a commentary on the division of labor among women and men:

just for today
using men
for rice-planting
(Donegan 148)

Perhaps Chiyo-ni was a bit satisfied to see a man used "just for today" as women are used every day for the difficult labor of working in the rice fields. Donegan notes that Chiyo-ni's choice of the word *tsukau*, which means to *use*, "could just be taken matter-of-factly; or on the other hand, the tone of this word could also be seen as bold, unrefined, or even feminist" (148). Although much of the haiku produced by Chiyo-ni and other women of her time and circumstance display relatively little explicit gender inflection, it is nevertheless important to note the female imagery and sympathetic portrayal of women in her poetry.

Female Imagery in Haiku

Flowers and the moon are commonly used images of femininity. Bashō wrote this starkly honest poem about women at the temple:

Among moon gazers
at the ancient temple grounds
not one beautiful face
(Selection)

One must assume that shorn, devoted nuns were not attractive enough for Bashō that evening. In contrast, Chiyo-ni combined the feminine images of flowers and the moon, referencing a moonflower. The following two haiku are iterations of the same poem, the second being more explicit:

moonflowers—
the beauty
of hidden things
(Donegan 140)

moonflowers!
When a woman's skin
is revealed
(Donegan 141)

The beautiful and hidden body of a woman is here compared to moonflowers: white, night-blooming, flowering plants. The hidden parts of the female body that are not exposed to the sun remain white. A woman disrobes discretely in the dark to bathe or change. The expectation of female discretion is also presented in the following poem:

change of kimono:
showing only her back
to the blossom's fragrance
(Donegan 138)

The change from a winter kimono to a summer kimono was marked by a seasonal ritual called *Koromogae* (Donegan 138). These four poems combine to suggest an underlying tone of reverence for the female body. Donegan notes that the following haiku moves from this tone of reverence towards sensuality; it is "an unusually powerful, direct, and sensual haiku for a woman of her time" (118):

woman's desire
deeply rooted—
the wild violets
(Donegan 118)

Wild violets are small, colorful, delicate, and perennial flowers. They bloom without cultivation as a beautiful gift of nature. There

is an undeniable sexuality implied in the imagery of this poem: the deep roots, desire, and wild violets. Yet, that sexuality is portrayed as natural, delicate, and a lovely aspect of the female body. This haiku could easily have been deemed scandalous, crossing the boundaries of poetic propriety, and yet the imagery does not approach the crude or indecent.

Bashō and his followers often utilized the symbolic link between a woman and the moon. In the following poem, Chiyo-ni simply notes the presence of the ubiquitous moon:

the line from the fishing rod
just touches
the summer moon
(Addiss 147)

This scene depicts the juxtaposition of the terrestrial act of fishing with the gentle presence of the omnipresent, celestial moon. In contrast, Bashō portrays the moon as a representative image of women generally:

the full moon
seven story-songs of a woman
turning towards the sea
(Selection)

Again, Chiyo-ni associates the moon with women, but she also includes the image of a beautiful flower to add sensuality to her haiku:

the moon's shadow
also pauses—
cherry blossom dawn
(Donegan 112)

Donegan states that "this haiku depicts the striking traditional beauty of *sakura* (cherry blossoms) to which a woman's beauty was often compared as in the court poetry of the Heian period (794–1186 A.D.)"

(112). The shadowed figure of a silent woman standing still in the moon's light is a striking image accompanied by the sweet, tantalizing smell of cherry blossoms. The following haiku by Chiyo-ni is very similar, but not quite as sensual:

evening temple bell
stopped in the sky
by cherry blossoms
(Donegan 112)

Donegan notes that "from a Buddhist perspective, this haiku depicts a moment of non-duality when the mind is stopped" (112). The reader imagines a woman connecting with nature, becoming one with the cherry blossom, unaware of the sounds that surround her. In Buddhism one attempts to release the mind and body from the influences of the world.

However, the human body is constantly being acted upon by forces of nature and men. With references to grooming, clothing, and the skin of women, Chiyo-ni has touched on the modern, feminist understanding of "embodiment;" the embodiment that she has continually sought to overcome. The critical concept of embodiment considers "the body . . . as the site at which experience is realized. That experience might be interpersonal or institutional; it might be physical or symbolic; the result of actual material practice or the consequence of ideas and value systems" (Cranny-Francis et al. 83). Chiyo-ni addresses the physical effects of fashion, nature, work, and weather on the female body:

the coolness—
of the bottom of her kimono
in the bamboo grove
(Donegan 134)

This poem simply describes the effect of cold on a body's senses. Chiyo-ni mentions the exposure to cold again in another poem:

cool breeze—
enclosed in my kimono sleeves
till falling asleep
(Donegan 134)

This poem brings to mind the image of a lone woman, clinging to her kimono in the night cold. She is cold and alone in the world, but she seeks sleep as a relief from the cold. Sleep is a pleasure and a temporary escape from the discomfort and cruelty of life.

As a nun, Chiyo-ni was able to live outside of the secular Japanese social order and dedicate her time and talents to her Buddhist faith and worshipful haiku. Upon taking her vows, she wrote the following:

Putting up my hair
no more
my hands to the kotatsu
(Donegan 208)

Donegan expounds on this poem, saying that "this haiku was written when . . . Chiyo-ni became a nun, shaved her head, and changed her name. The *kotatsu* is a table covered with a quilt, with a charcoal brazier under it. This haiku shows her realization in the freedom that she could now fully live the Way of Haiku" (208). Her choice to become a nun obviously resulted in a corporeal change, a lack of hair and makeup. Yet, as a nun, Chiyo-ni could live unfettered by the societal constraints of fashion and society. As a literary celebrity, there were most likely social expectations of dress and appearance with which she would have been expected to conform. Prior to becoming a nun, Chiyo-ni must have had to wear rouge and maintain long hair. In *Haiku Inspirations: Poems and Meditations on Nature and Beauty* (2006), Tom Lowenstein explains the significance of freedom from the social pressures placed on Japanese women.

> From as early as the tenth century, many Japanese poets became preoccupied by two contrasting experiences: the demands of social life versus the pleasures of solitude. . . . [P]oetry, like medita-

> tion, could be a medium of spiritual experience, and haiku poets' writing often emerged from the solitary, meditative poetic mood that they actively cultivated. . . . Poetry was a sacred discipline. (49)

In the documentary *Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire* (2004), Eko Ikegami observes that women of society, whether they were empresses, courtesans, geisha, or prostitutes, powdered and painted their skin white, which would not be the case for the lower classes of women who worked in the fields. Women in Japanese society were commodified in all classes and stations, either for their title and lands, the provision of pleasure, or for their labor. Their station in Japanese society determined the bodily experiences that women were forced to endure. Women who worked in the fields were required to labor in the heat and elements, while a geisha was expected to prepare herself to serve the desires and needs of men. Class, race, and gender dictated the path of a woman's life more so than the choices she made, because the phallocentric society into which she was born had limited her choices to suit its demands. A lady of the court was locked away in near darkness, hidden from the world. A prostitute's body was painted, hiding her true identity, and then it was used for selfish pleasure, only to be discarded. Some of Chiyo-ni's fellow nuns, including one woman named Kasenjo, were former prostitutes. According to Donegan, "it was not unusual for a nun to be friends with a prostitute because both were outside the normal social structure, having freedom unlike other women to devote to writing" (37). Chiyo-ni acknowledges the plight of the prostitute with this gloomy haiku:

on her day off
the prostitute wakes up alone—
the night's chill
(Donegan 167)

When the body of the prostitute is unencumbered by the demands of a man, she is left alone, cold, and unloved. Chiyo-ni's haiku illuminates

the limited and dismal lives that were relegated to the women of her day.

In *Japan; Memoirs of a Secret Empire*, Cecilia Segawa Seigler points out that hundreds of courtesans and prostitutes were trained from a young age to please men and to hide their true feelings. Geishas, for example, wore bright red lip paint, and many blackened their teeth to hide their expression: "These women were unhappy, but they had to act like they were happy" (*Japan: Memoirs*). Seigler explains further that many courtesans, geisha, and prostitutes often died young from ill-performed abortions and syphilis. Those that outlived their usefulness often became nuns. The Buddhist temples were a dumping ground for so many women who could no longer serve the needs of men through sexual performance or hard labor. The temple was also a respite from the demands of Japanese society.

As nuns, these retired prostitutes, as well as Chiyo-ni, could forgo the extravagant hairstyles, makeup, body powder, and paint that were such a part of mainstream society. Chiyo-ni wrote the following haiku, reveling in the freedom of her unadorned body.

Rouged lips
forgotten—
clear spring water
(Donegan 142)

Hays further explains that in addition to hair and clothing, "many Japanese women used beni, material made from flowers that looks green when dry but almost magically turns bright red when water is applied to it." With no rouge or red *beni* on her lips, the clear water can be enjoyed on a physical level with no societal restriction. On a spiritual level, she chose the 'Way of the Haiku' to fulfill her personal desire "to teach her heart to be like the clear water which flows night and day" (Hirshfield 160). Donegan comments on the particular significance of this poem:

> This is one of Chiyo's best and most memorable realization haiku: she wrote four different versions of this haiku at different stages of

> her life, showing not only her dedication as an artist, but her progression of realization as well. The last one, written at age sixty-two, shows her forgetting her rouged lips while drinking the fresh water. This haiku expresses the heightened awareness that comes when one forgets the self and the mind is present to the moment. (142)

Chiyo-ni chose to remain unmarried and to dedicate her life to her faith and art. This devotion was cemented and her former life was forgotten with her choice to become a nun, which allowed her to finish her life without obligation to societal or temporal expectations. As Chiyo-ni chose to "forget the self" and no longer conform to the hollow and subjective expectations of women in society, she produced memorable and meaningful haiku.

In a 1994 interview, Master Nakano, an abbot of Shokoji temple in Matto and a Chiyo-ni scholar, commented that "before she became a nun, she had too much technique, trying to impress people, but after becoming a nun, she was liberated and purer and forgot herself" (qtd. in Donegan 46). Master Nakano highlighted the following verse in particular:

full moon—
keeping it in my eyes
on a distant walk
(Donegan 46)

This poem could be interpreted such that the full moon represents the author, Chiyo-ni, as a woman that is full, complete, or fulfilled, or that she is traveling with an eye single to completion or wholeness. Master Nakano makes the case that "the moon is a symbol of realization. This haiku shows she has no attachments, walking on the spiritual path, relaxing in the light of the moon, which cools desire, and keeping the light of awareness in her eyes" (Donegan 46). Each reader can formulate an interpretation, but this poem had a special meaning for Chiyo-ni: "It was this haiku which Chiyo-ni chose to write in calligraphy on her *zutabukuro*, the cloth bag which she wore as part of her Buddhist robes" (46–47).

Conclusion

Donegan observes that "Japanese critics are fond of saying Bashō's haiku are like diamonds and Chiyo-ni's are like pearls" (84-5). How appropriate, as Bashō's poetry is cold, measured, and rigid and does not delve into the feelings and sentiments of his subjects, but he maintained "the aesthetic of the impersonal" (84). Although Chiyo-ni's haiku was undoubtedly influenced by the style of Bashō, she inserted sympathy and concern for human life, especially for women. Thus, the comparison to an opulent, round pearl is highly appropriate. She addressed women's issues and their societal subjugation within her haiku motif. Her work was suppressed and chided for over a century by a male-dominated academia. Ueda explains that "Few collections of haiku by premodern female poets are readily available today, not only because such poets were few in number but because most haiku scholars and anthologists in today's Japan are male" (ix). Chiyo-ni is finally being recognized by scholars and literary circles for her talent as well as her bold verse, which diverged from the social boundaries of female silence and suppression.

even the butterfly
voiceless—
Buddhist service
(Donegan 127)

For centuries, the voices of women were silenced by the restrictions of Japanese culture.

The work of Patricia Donegan, Makoto Ueda, and others have brought the poetry of Chiyo-ni into focus. Her haiku describes many of the women's issues that are being addressed by modern feminist discourse. No longer considered a strictly male interest, the reading and writing of haiku are on the rise in Japan as well as in western countries. Ueda points out that "a number of haiku groups, each publishing a magazine, are currently headed by women" (xiv). This female influence on modern haiku is a manifestation of Chiyo-ni's poem about the dispersal of ideas:

From the mind
of a single, long vine
one hundred opening lives
(Hirshfield 163)

In her final years, as Chiyo-ni's health declined she was cared for by her devoted friend, Suejo, and her adopted son Haku. A few days before her death in 1775, she spoke her final haiku, her jisei, or farewell poem to the world. Richard Tice notes in "Farewell Haiku of Basho and Chiyoni" that "women used the personal pronoun *ware* in their letters and ended them with the word *kashiku*, a word like "yours truly" (107). The following is Chiyo-ni's farewell poem.

Tsuki mo mite ware wa kono yo o kashiku kana
Looking also at the moon
I write to this world
"yours truly"
(Tice 107)

In discussing the poem, Tice concludes that "the moon both keeps her in the world but takes her out of it—a fitting way to say goodbye" (107). She shares her desire for spiritual detachment, as her focus on the beauty of the moon speaks of a separate but present aspect of this world. The moon lights the night sky from its distant position in the heavens. She accepts the "suchness" of her death while still seeking the beauty of life.

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I wanna be God's backup singer

I'm not fightin' for the melody, Lord,
but could I back you up?
Just behind and to the left—
could I wear long white gloves and do a little pointing?
Big hair, big lashes, red, red lips—let me do-wop
shuffle, show a little leg. I'll take whatever part you need,
scarf-fluttering descant chime or the support underneath,
swingin' low and breathy in the dusk. I can wail. I can arch
and dip, looking knowingly down off that stage so that
if someone happens to glance past the main act
I'll be there, sweet and solid as anybody's mama and lover
and favorite easy chair all in one, fleshy and worn just right
and a little surprising. Don't need center stage,
Lord, but let me strut with my sisters, in synch,
all swivel and sass. When you lift off, I wanna be
ridin' that jetstream coattail contrail conga line to glory,
rounding the bridge to one more chorus,
the one that brings us home.

–Darlene Young

"The Headless Horseman Pursuing Ichabod Crane" by John Quidor, 1858

"The Genius of Famine Descending": Ichabod Crane and the Third Horseman of Revelation

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First published in 1820 in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is a dreamlike tale that "enters the reader's mind and heart forever" (McCormick xv). It has become, for scholars and lay readers alike, one of the most beloved and iconic of all American short stories. Written during a long stay in Great Britain and inspired in part by old European folktales, this "masterly, bewitching, magical" (Neider xxi) account of an English-bred schoolmaster from Connecticut who wears out his welcome in a quiet Dutch enclave has been made into several theatrical and television films as well as animated versions and comic book abridgements. The tale's main character, the gangly Ichabod Crane, a man "of no little vanity" (Irving 276), has been portrayed on screens big and small by actors as diverse as Will Rogers in an early silent version (1922), Jeff Goldblum and Ed Begley, Jr. in television treatments (1980, 1985, respectively), and Johnny Depp in a dreary Tim Burton production (1999) that had almost nothing to do with the original story save for a few character names and the last two words of the title.

A college dropout whose parents had hoped that he would become a New York City lawyer, Washington Irving, America's first

professional man of letters, was a devoted if largely self-taught student of many subjects, be they academic or otherwise. Among the topics that drew his interest most was religion, and to that end, whether the "inveterate traveler" (Neider xxxvii) was in Europe or back home in America, he read voraciously and regularly from various sacred texts, including the Old and New Testaments. Down the years, scholars of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" have pointed out the tale's many subtle allusions to and echoes of the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, wherein a green and fertile Eden is put at risk because a scheming interloper—in the form of a garrulous serpent—ingratiates himself to Eve and soon persuades the young beauty to turn her back on all that she knows in order to follow his invidious counsel. Ichabod, an outsider who possesses "the dilating powers of an Anaconda" (Irving 275), is, of course, the "ingratiating" (276) serpent in Irving's New World garden. However, in this charming tale about "a pastoral homeland envisioned by poets since the time of Virgil" (Daigrepont 74), the Ichabod character offers even subtler echoes of another important and mysterious Biblical figure, not from the first book of the Bible this time but from the very last: the Revelation of Saint John the Divine. For Irving's description of Sleepy Hollow's new schoolmaster, an enigmatic black-clad rider on a borrowed steed, conjures up imagery that is tellingly suggestive of the Third Horseman of the Apocalypse, that dark and baleful rider who carries a set of scales aloft and brings famine and privation in his wake.

Written to "warn the complacent and the worldly, and encourage the faithful" (Sweet 651), the Book of Revelation is the Apostle John's disturbing vision of the horrific events that will, according to him, transpire at the end of days, when Christ will return to the world and pass judgement upon humanity. Scholars from all denominations have debated, sometimes heatedly so, the meanings of the many names, numbers, colors, and places in this highly symbolic book, a dizzying "kaleidoscope of imagery" and metaphor (Kraybill 33). One of the most "multivalent" (Sweet 654) events in the much-disputed work occurs in Chapter Six when the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are turned loose to descend upon the earth from north,

south, east, and west, thus eliminating all points of escape. In his vision of the commencing of this Day of Judgement, John sees the Lamb (Christ) holding a great scroll that is kept closed by seven wax seals. When Christ breaks open these impresses one by one, the first four of the seals release terrifying horsemen, each astride a different color mount. This ominous quartet of riders, the "personifications of the evils" (Benet 361) which will afflict the earth at the end time, thus gallop down from the heavens to spread assorted destruction, chaos, and suffering.

When the first seal of the great scroll of Revelation is opened, John declares, "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Rev. 6.1). In the opinion of most New Testament scholars, this bow-wielding first rider symbolizes military conquest and invasion, earthly empires and golden crowns won by brute force of arms. This, of course, has nothing to do with the slightly-built Ichabod Crane—the "cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person" (Irving 274)—for he is a pacifist at heart, an artful dodger of all things violent or potentially violent: "He had, however, a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance in his nature; he was in form and spirit like a supple jack—yielding [and] though he bent, he never broke" (282). Hence, this cultured urbanite in a black suit and matching tri-corner hat seeks to build his "little empire" (275) in Sleepy Hollow by "headwork" (276) and guile, not martial prowess.

Upon the opening of the second seal, reports John, "there went out another horse *that was* red: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (6.4). This intimidating Second Horseman represents war, and he comes to spread destruction with his mighty weapon, to set nation against nation until all lands are bathed in blood. Ichabod has no connection to this rider either since the new schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow brandishes not a sword in his right hand whenever he goes about on horseback, but rather a small whip or crop, lent to him by one of his rustic Dutch patrons just like both steed and saddle. Then later on

when the Fourth Horseman of Revelation is released and goes charging across the darkening firmament, he sits astride "a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (6.8). Although he may indeed be the most fearsome of John's iconic quartet of galloping doom—he wields a reaper's scythe in most depictions of the Four Horsemen—this fourth supernatural rider in the sky likewise has nothing in common with Ichabod Crane save that they are both mounted and both of them will bring affliction and troubled times in their wake.

Instead, it is the Third Horseman of the Apocalypse, generally seen as the most enigmatic and mysterious of the four, who is echoed and evoked by the gaunt silhouette of the ambitious Yankee schoolmaster who hails from out of state and harbors secret dreams of gaining great wealth at someone else's expense. For when the third seal is cracked open by the Lamb of God, John proclaims, "I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and *see* thou hurt not the oil and the wine" (6.5–6). The set of scales or balances brandished by this tertiary rider do not symbolize war or violence, conquest or death, but are instead a more insidious and nuanced symbol of the suffering that is to come. They represent scarcity and shortage and the subsequent profiteering off of the misery and want of others.

According to most New Testament scholars, John's references to "measures" of wheat and barley "for a penny" are all about inflation and price gouging in times of famine and crop failure. "A quart of wheat," writes Ian R. Fair in his *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, "was barely enough to feed one person for one day, and three quarts of barley [a lesser grain] were barely enough to feed a small family for one day" (189). Hence, the balances carried by the Third Horseman mean hard times are ahead, if not outright starvation, then something very near it. And that is precisely what Ichabod Crane, described by the narrator as "a huge feeder" (Irving 275), brings at his back: "He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his

sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together" (274). Moreover, the new schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow has "huge ears" that are perfect for eavesdropping as well as "large green glassy eyes," the very color of envy (274). Plus, he sports "a long snipe nose," which he loves to insert into other people's business (274).

Long before Ichabod Crane is even mentioned in Irving's "universally popular" (Springer xxxii) tale of a secluded agrarian paradise along the Hudson River circa 1790, the framing narrator, a Dutch historian and chronicler named Diedrich Knickerbocker, spends the first several paragraphs describing—"with all possible laud" (Irving 274)—the "green, sheltered, fertile" place that is known as Sleepy Hollow. "If ever I should wish for a retreat," says the narrator, "whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley" (272). From one generation to the next, this "drowsy, dreamy" (273) redoubt of Dutchness has been stubbornly protected by the descendants of the original explorers and adventurers who first settled there almost two centuries earlier. The "sequestered glen" is a place of "sabbath stillness" (272) wherein the easy-going farmers and herders enjoy happy and fulfilling lives existing in gentle harmony with nature and its "hearty abundance" (279), far removed from the noise and aggravation of the outside world.

There is a beautiful "grove of walnut trees" (272) to shade, shelter, and perfume one side of Sleepy Hollow as well as to provide rich nuts and fine gunstocks for the self-sufficient locals who enjoy the many benefits of a vertical economy. The other three sides of "this by-place of nature" are protected from extreme weather and the "incessant changes" (274) of the outside world by steep, tree-laden hills of oak, maple, chestnut, and cedar. There is abundant sweet water from both well and spring, incredibly rich soil, and more than ample rains. In essence, Sleepy Hollow, "one of the quietest places in the whole world" (272), is a calm and fragrant refuge from all of the clamor and strife, the worry and rush, of the galloping mercantilism that exists to the east and the south in the cities populated by ambitious urban types, that is to say, furtive men like Ichabod, who see natural beauty

and imagine how they might exploit it for profit and vainglory. In the eyes of the new schoolmaster, an omnivore who "yearns to swallow the world" (Martin 143), everything in the fertile Dutch enclave is but a series of commodities, timber, cattle, crops, that are ripe for the plucking.

And so Ichabod Crane, oozing with self-confidence, secure in his cultural superiority over the local inhabitants, descends into this "romantic and sequestered" valley (Reichart 30). He will prove, during the course of his several months in Sleepy Hollow, that he is a deadly serious, even if nonviolent and somewhat comical, threat to the wealth and stability of "this enchanted region" (Irving 272). Although he has been contracted merely to teach a basic curriculum to the children of the local Dutch farmers in exchange for his daily meals and a modest "maintenance" (275), once he has arrived in their bountiful valley and has carefully assessed its "hearty abundance" (279), the new schoolmaster begins to exhibit much larger and grander aspirations and appetites. For soon this haughty newcomer "of superior elegance and address" decides on the fly that, "'by hook or by crook'" (276), he will wrest control of Sleepy Hollow and its assets away from the simple-minded agricultural types who live there.

Indeed, the "pedagogue's mouth watered, as he looked upon this" land that is so rich and ready for exploitation (279). However, once that mercenary "enterprize" (280) of his is accomplished, Ichabod does not intend to remain in the Dutch valley—a Thomas Cole painting come to vivid life—and make his permanent home there, enjoying its "repose and abundance" (279) while seated comfortably with pipe and flagon in front of a "crackling wood fire" (278). On the contrary, the single-minded and constantly restive schoolmaster intends to convert all of Sleepy Hollow's "immense treasures" (280) into piles of "bright shillings" (276), since he cares nothing at all for the land itself. It is but a means to an end for him, and that end is "cash" (280) at all costs. In order to highlight his selfish and destructive nature, the green-eyed interloper with the long nose and prehensile ears is described in terms that are not only ominous and off-putting, but downright apocalyptic, for the narrator's depiction

of Ichabod at one point clearly evokes the dreaded Third Horseman of Saint John's Revelation: "To see him [Ichabod] striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield" (274).

When not in his little log schoolhouse brandishing the birch rod of authority over his cowering Dutch pupils, this "genius of famine" (274) likes to engage in marathon "perambulations" (278) around his new neighborhood. The locals think nothing of Ichabod's long, circular walks, believing that what the new schoolmaster does in his spare time, no matter how silly or peculiar, is his own business. But what this black-clad visitor is actually doing is not for purposes of leg-stretching or wool-gathering, nor is he thinking about the next day's lesson plans or homework as he ambles along at a steady clip. Rather, he is carefully reconnoitering his new surroundings, measuring them, all in order to better appreciate just what "difficulties and impediments" (281) may hinder his secret plot to somehow overthrow the tranquil Dutch hamlet in hopes of achieving "quick economic gain" for himself (Clere 455).

In effect, by using his position as schoolmaster, a post second only to the local minister in status and influence, he more or less spies on the unsuspecting citizens of Sleepy Hollow, thereby discovering which families have the biggest farms, the handsomest homes, the fattest herds and flocks, the finest fields and orchards, and, of course, the most eligible daughters. Then once the covetous Ichabod has learned, via much eavesdropping and prying, the ways and means of this "peaceful, self-contained society" (Ringe 405), he sets into concrete motion his egocentric scheme to overthrow, "by diverse little makeshifts" (Irving 276), the quiet enclave that is so rich in natural resources and untapped capital. Of course, if this gaunt rider in all black—"the genius of famine descending" (274)—is successful in his secret endeavor to turn Sleepy Hollow "topsy-turvy" (277), he will bring Revelation-like scarcity and ruination to this productive dell tucked snugly away along the eastern shore of "the mighty Hudson" (286).

After feeling out the local population for a few weeks, Ichabod, described as a man of "shrewdness," "appetite," and "capacious swallow" (277), creates for himself the position of "singing master" (276) at the local Dutch reformed church. This is his first bold step in acquiring position and sway in Sleepy Hollow, and the proud upstart from the Nutmeg State next door quickly impresses the rural congregation if not with his musical talent, then certainly with his swagger and his volume: "It was a matter of no little vanity to him on Sundays, to take his station in front of the church gallery with a band of chosen singers; where in his own mind, he completely carried away the palm from the parson. Certain it is, his voice resounded far above the rest of the congregation" (276). One of the brash interloper's "musical disciples" (278) soon catches his attention. Ichabod's heart beats faster every time Katrina Van Tassel, the premier heiress in the whole region, comes into view wearing her "provocatively short petticoat," which allows her to show off "the prettiest foot and ankle in the country round" (278). She is described by the narrator as "a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge; ripe and melting and rosy cheeked as one of her father's peaches" (278).

However, the main reason that this local girl appeals so much to the ambitious "flogger of urchins" (288) is not due to her considerable beauty or her fine attire, which includes a small fortune in gold jewelry brought over from the Netherlands by "her great great grandmother" (278). Rather, it is because the buxom Katrina is the daughter and only child of the richest farmer in all of Sleepy Hollow, and so this attractive young girl is "universally famed" for her "vast expectations" of both real estate and hard currency (278). Accordingly, if the new pedagogue, a man of "prosaic acquisitiveness" (Plummer and Nelson 175), can convince this Rubenesque beauty to marry him, he will, by default, become a member of the local aristocracy, rising to the top of the valley's hierarchy with a simple "I do." And so "the enraptured Ichabod" (Irving 279) decides to ply his urban charms on this simple country girl, fully convinced "in his own mind" (276) that before very long he will sweep her off her feet and have her standing next to him, all blonde, blushing, and compliant, at the altar of the little Dutch church in the woods: "From

the moment Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight, the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel" (280).

The determined schoolmaster pursues this local beauty "like the lion bold," flaunting his many cultural advantages over her other suitors, a group of "bashful country bumpkins" (276) who lack his book learning and his worldly ways. The voluptuous young girl, viewed as "a morsel" (278) by the ravenous Ichabod, embodies Sleepy Hollow itself, for she suggests all of its incredible bounty, its "opulence" (285) and "rural wealth" (291). Katrina is like a Dutch Eve to the locals, a rustic Venus in her "homespun petticoats" (286), the great earth mother of the New World and a symbol of the Hollow's continued fertility and abundance. Therefore, if this teenaged beauty, "the pride and flower" (286) of the whole county round, does agree to marry the reedy Ichabod and move away with him as he plans—to "Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where!" (280)—then the new schoolmaster will prove but the vanguard for "legions" (274) of new fortune seekers from Connecticut and other points east who will soon inundate the quiet hideaway and turn this beautiful Dutch Canaan, a place of Biblical "milk" and "honey" (287), into just another wasteland, stripped of its natural resources, left as barren and infertile as Carthage after the Romans had their way with it.

On a pleasant afternoon in "the sumptuous time of autumn" (287), a messenger arrives at the little log schoolhouse to inform Ichabod that he has been invited to the annual harvest ball hosted by Baltus Van Tassel, Katrina's doting father and the wealthiest landowner in the entire region. Ichabod, who fancies himself a man "of vastly superior taste and accomplishments" (276), sees this invitation as a sure sign that he is now perceived as a member of the socially elite class in his new environs. After dismissing his Dutch charges "an hour before the usual time," the excited schoolmaster prepares himself for a romantic evening of dining and dancing and flirting by feverously "brushing and furbishing up his best, and indeed only suit of rusty black, and arranging his looks by a bit of broken looking glass, that hung up in the school house" (284). This self-styled Connecticut sophisticate and "man of letters"—he has "read

several books quite through" (276)—believes that within a few hours, the lovely Katrina will eagerly accept his marriage proposal; and then the "immense treasures" (280) of her family's vast farm, indeed, all the other farms as well, will fall under his control, ready for liquidation and investment at high yield, thus giving him the "wonderfully easy life of it" (276) that he has dreamed of for years.

Since Ichabod is but an itinerant schoolmaster with no horse of his own—all his worldly belongings can fit into a single cotton handkerchief—he is forced to borrow both a mount and a saddle from the local farmer with whom he is currently "domiciliated, a choleric old Dutchman, of the name of Hans Van Ripper" (284). Then once Ichabod is mounted, he goes cantering off down the road "like a knight errant in quest of adventure" (284), with "the skirts of his black coat" fluttering out behind him "almost to the horse's tail" (285). This borrowed steed is no prancing stallion, but is instead "a broken down plough horse that had outlived everything but his viciousness" (284). The animal is named "Gunpowder," appropriate because of his explosive disposition, but perhaps also for his dark coloring, a detail which is never mentioned outright in the story: "He was gaunt and shagged, with a ewe neck and a head like a hammer . . . one eye had lost its pupil, and was glaring and spectral, but the other had the gleam of a genuine devil in it" (284–85).

During the course of his long service on the farm, this half-blind equine has absorbed much of Heer Van Ripper's "furious" attitude toward the world, for "old and broken down as he looked, there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country" (285). And so Ichabod, presenting "altogether such an apparition as is seldom to be met with in broad day light" (285), becomes much like the Third Horseman of John's Revelation, "the genius of famine" set loose and "descending upon" (274) an unsuspecting Sleepy Hollow, fully intending to ride in on horseback and deprive the place of its most beautiful maiden and all of its prosperity besides, thereby rendering the fertile Dutch "strong hold" (279), after many generations of incredible abundance, a land of paucity and want.

As he jostles along on his merry way to "the castle of Heer Van Tassel" (286) for what will prove to be an especially momentous

evening, Ichabod, all "animated and joyous" (288), cannot help but smile from atop his loaned horse as he takes in the color and splendor of a "jolly autumn" in the lush Hudson Valley: "The forests had put on their sober brown and yellow, while some trees of the tenderer kind had been nipped by the frosts into brilliant dyes of orange, purple, and scarlet" (285). This slender horseman, a veritable "whirlwind" (294) of consumption, swells with self-satisfaction as he views the natural bounty that will soon be his for the liquidating: "On all sides he beheld vast stores of apples, some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees, some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market, others heaped up in rich piles for the cider press" (286). As Ichabod clip-clops along past barn after barn "bursting forth with the treasures of the farm" (279), this skeletal "harbinger" (277) of famine and scarcity also spies "great fields of Indian corn" to the left and to the right, followed by fields of ripened pumpkins and other gourd vegetables. Then later on, he literally licks his lips over "the fragrant buckwheat fields, breathing the odor of the bee hive, and as he beheld them, soft anticipations stole over his mind of dainty slap jacks, well buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle, by the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel" (286). Astride his demonic one-eyed horse, the ambitious pedagogue "could not help, too, rolling his large [green] eyes round him [and] chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable luxury and splendor" (287).

Several hours later, after much dining, dancing, and socializing, the Van Tassel harvest ball finally begins to break up, and so "the country folk" (273) slowly make their way home by cart and buggy "along the hollow roads, and over the distant hills" (290) to their fairytale farms and cottages. Ichabod, however, "according to the custom of country lovers," remains behind in order to have a cozy "tête-à-tête with the heiress," for he is supremely confident that his big-city charms—as well as his just demonstrated dancing prowess—have worked their magic on the simple-minded Katrina, who is "the lady of his heart" (281) and the means to achieving all of his mercenary goals. But at this late-night tryst, something goes terribly wrong between the two of them, for the most desirable heiress in the Hudson Valley spurns

his marriage proposal: "Let it suffice to say, Ichabod stole forth with the air of one who had been sacking a hen roost, rather than a fair lady's heart" (291). Crushed by her rejection, apparently a definitive one, the tall rider in fluttering black clothes immediately retrieves his sleeping horse from the Van Tassel barn, kicks the old animal smartly in the ribs half a dozen times, and then sets off for the long ride back to the Van Ripper farm some miles distant.

As every child who has read or heard the story knows, "It was the very witching time of night that Ichabod, heavy hearted and crest fallen, pursued his travel homewards, along the sides of the lofty hills which rise above Tarry Town, and which he had traversed so cheerily in the afternoon" (291). Amid the dead hush and the solitude, everything this invasive horseman sees and hears along the deserted roadway makes him flinch and shudder, for he has heard—and believed wholesale—all of the "tales of ghosts and apparitions" (289) that he has heard from the local inhabitants. However, he especially remembers the one about the Headless Horseman, a spectral rider who scours Sleepy Hollow every night in search of his missing head and spirits away any mortal who dares to cross his path: "The night grew darker and darker; the stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky, and driving clouds occasionally hid them from his sight. He had never felt so lonely and dismal" (291). After navigating his way past many a ghostly tree and shrub, the nervous Ichabod approaches a small creek that is "considered a haunted stream" by the locals: for it is the very place where Major John Andre, the famous British spy, was arrested by Dutch sentries during the late Revolution and was soon thereafter consigned to the hangman (292). Several hand-hewn "logs laid side by side served as a bridge over" this sinister waterway, and on the "side of the road where the brook entered the wood, a group of oaks and chestnuts matted thick with wild grapevines threw a cavernous gloom over" the eerie crossing and everything around it (292).

Suddenly, "the affrighted pedagogue" freezes in his borrowed saddle when he hears something moving in the edge of the woods just off the roadway. But before he can decide in which direction to spur his borrowed horse, to the blind side or the sighted, a figure huge

and ominous rises from the gloom "like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveler" (292). It is the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow, out for his nightly ride. Ichabod, seized with terror, kicks and whips Gunpowder into a full gallop, almost flinging himself from the saddle with the effort: "Away, then, they dashed, through thick and thin; stones flying, and sparks flashing, at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air, as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight" (293). This "unskilful rider . . . had much ado to maintain his seat; sometimes slipping on one side, sometimes on another, and sometimes jolted on the high ridge of his horse's back bone, with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder" (294). At the end of this frantic midnight pursuit through the backwoods, past marsh and forest and pasture alike, the presumptuous schoolmaster who would make himself king of this beautiful "realm" (283) is knocked from his horse by a hurled jack o'lantern, is "tumbled headlong into the dust" and never seen again (294).

The next day, old Gunpowder is found by his concerned owner, but despite a thorough search of road, forest, and stream, "the body of the schoolmaster was not to be discovered" (295). The only trace left of the missing Englishman from Connecticut is his faded tri-corner hat found trampled in the dirt by a heavy horse and rider. Thus, after much noise and terror, much wild galloping through the backcountry darkness, the Dutch paradise of "contented" (278) farmers and herders is saved from the visiting horseman's covert scheme to gain "wealth" (279) and "cash" (280) while spreading hunger and ruin in his wake. Not long after Ichabod's mysterious disappearance, "the blooming Katrina" (282) and her favorite Dutch suitor, the strapping Abraham Van Brunt—"hero of the country round" (281)—walk down the aisle of the little whitewashed church in the woods. The handsome young couple prove to be just as prolific as the fertile valley that raised them, thus guaranteeing that their traditional agrarian way of life, so simple and happy, will survive for many generations to come, leaving the Van Tassels, the Van Rippers, the Van Brunts, *et al.*, undisturbed by the "bustle and hubbub" (284) of the outside world as personified by the routed interloper from out of state.

Therefore, at bottom, "Irving's tale is one of preservation then, of maintenance" and gentle continuity (Plummer and Nelson 176).

In the unanimous opinion of "the old Dutch wives" of Sleepy Hollow (Irving 277), acknowledged as infallible experts in all matters of the supernatural, Ichabod Crane, that most "unfortunate pedagogue" (296), was without a doubt spirited away at the very stroke of midnight—"in a flash of fire and brimstone" (294)—by the Headless Horseman. This paranormal explanation becomes historical fact to the local people, as actual to them as the many Revolutionary War battles that were fought nearby at White Plains and Stony Point. Nevertheless, according to one old Dutch farmer who ventured down to New York City some years after the schoolmaster's mysterious disappearance, Ichabod, "a victim of his own overreaching" (Anderson 208), was not carried away by the Headless Horseman after all. Instead, the rejected suitor, thwarted in his selfish plans, absconded downstate to lick his wounds; and once there, he kept school, read law at night, and eventually became a small-claims judge. And so, in the end, this skeletal rider in flowing black who plotted to bring famine and destitution to the bountiful valley of contented agrarians is finally associated, albeit belatedly, with the signature set of balances that are held aloft by the Third Horseman of Saint John's Revelation: for the very symbol of judgeship since ancient times is a set of scales, even in "the Ten-Pound Court" of New York City (Irving 296).

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Peking Duck Three Ways

A meeting of imagination and economy,
it affirms the bird's physicality:
first the skin, crackling and glazed,
then the flesh, flash-cooked on high heat,
then the bones, simmered to soup.

You don't mind its deconstruction tableside,
the head removed, the skin lifted off in sheets
and arranged on a plate, with or without thin slices of meat.

It does not evoke that day on the crowded interstate
when a mother duck and her entourage tried to cross, three babies instantly flattened,
their downy bellies turned to the sky, their mother oblivious, eyeing the median.

This avian demise is a different matter, purposeful, elegant.
In its aftermath, three blind men meet an elephant.
A duck is crispy and sweet.
A duck is tender and savory.
A duck is a hot beverage, rounding out a meal.

The cooks began before you thought to dine out.
Two days ago, the duck was inflated, dipped in a cauldron,
then hung in a breezy space to dry – as initial preparation.

Since this cannot be a single duck but a chain of ducks
making long-simmered broth so quickly possible,
one duck three ways is more symbolic than literal,

needing a community that keeps the tables full.
But even in isolation, it would be metaphorical:
first to celebrate the duck as an animal,

then to celebrate duck the abstraction,
then to celebrate the essence of duck, coaxed into water.

The essence of duck comes not from a particular duck, but from all ducks.
By this point in the evening, the shape of hunger has progressed.
Almost sated, you seek less to be fed, more to be blessed.

–Adrienne Su

Book Reviews

Pilgrim, You Find the Path by Walking: Poems. **By Jeanne Murray Walker. Paraclete P, 2019. 96 pp. $19 (paperback).**

In his essay "Liberating Form," literary critic Marden Clark asserts that a poem "gets most of its energy from what the poet does with its form: from the way it works within or strains against or plays with the conventions of its form" (5–6). In this way, the strict form of a sonnet, for example, actually liberates the poem because of the form's ability to charge the poem's energy. Jeanne Murray Walker would agree. In her preface to her ninth collection of poetry, *Pilgrim, You Find the Path* by Walking (2019), she describes how the book arose out of an effort to get more energy into her work. Having become "tired of [her] own voice," she turned to "the old masters" of poetry and rediscovered the "athletic, pithy, memorable, nuanced iambic pentameter lines" of the great sonnets (XIII). In response, she says, she set herself the challenge of writing ten sonnets. But the chore became a delight. The energy and power of working within, and in tension with, strict form led to a rejuvenation of her craft, and the project grew to one hundred sonnets. She calls the process her "pilgrimage with the sonnet" (XIII).

But this book is a pilgrimage in more ways than the journey of the writer to create the poems. The word *pilgrimage* has religious overtones, and this is a religious book. Not just because some of the poems are overtly religious, taking the form of prayers or even spoken in God's voice as He sheds light on the seeker. The poems, taken all together, describe and create the Christian metaphor of life as pilgrimage. And in the Christian journey, the seeking itself has an intrinsic holiness. These poems celebrate the holiness of the process, the present, the being in the midst of things; they celebrate the journey as much as the arrival.

In his essay on form, Clark goes on to describe literary form as a metaphor for religious life. Like the constraints of the sonnet, he says, religious life (ritual, obedience to laws) can "provide the liberating form which gives direction, order, meaning to our [own] energy. The Church can liberate that energy by giving it control and form" (11). Perhaps, then, we might say while experiencing Murray's collection that a sonnet is to prose as the Church (or any form of striving for a spiritual way of walking—the pilgrimage) is to life. Within structure, freedom. Within journey, arrival. Within yearning, presence. In her preface, Walker describes how the sonnet came to be, for her, "a force of energy so great that the form itself felt sacramental" (XVII). *Sacrament*: the divine within the mundane becoming holy in its process, the physical as vehicle for grace.

Thus, Walker's inquiry is not just about how *structure* defines a sonnet (those fourteen lines, strict rhyme pattern, iambic pentameter), but also about how experience makes a sonnet—or, rather, what a sonnet can make of experience. The pilgrim's destination becomes holiness in the present, the sense of resonance or presence within an individual moment or experience. The writing of the sonnet sanctifies the experience it describes.

But so, of course, should its reading. And these pieces meet the challenge—both spiritually and aesthetically. They conform gracefully to the strict requirements of the sonnet enough to be identified as such. All are fourteen lines, though Walker breaks some lines up across the page to avail herself of the benefits of additional line breaks—a pause, or emphasis, such as this from "What Was I Thinking? ":

> Not of the fawn, but his terror, leaping through shade,
> crimson flower blooming in his side,

and how he fell.
Not the lily; its long fade
and droop.
Not Sally, but the way she died. (X)

The sense of iambic pentameter is regular enough that its exceptions are interesting and charged, though if there is looseness in the form in any aspect it is here, in the number of syllables per line. The rhyme is breathtaking in its elegance—none of the clunky awkwardness typical of syntax that has been twisted for rhyme. To maintain that elegance, Walker plays loose with the overall rhyme scheme while maintaining the sense of the turn. It is a joy to see how she respectfully tickles and massages the form. These are true, skillful sonnets taking full advantage of the form.

Walker's poetic language is pleasurably musical—subtle, not distractingly flashy. Its imagery is a delight, blooming through its metaphors. A dollhouse fireplace is the "size of a box / for commas" (63). A child's hand as she learns to write is "blind as a baby sow" (6). A mouse has "red alcoholic eyes" (17). In "The Lecture," reminiscent of Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," the speaker, having just heard a lecture about how all around us and inside us are atoms that were once part of stars, heads outside to "where lightning slices night" to bellow stardust from her throat (44).

Perhaps it can be said that all poems are about poetry as much as they are about their surface subject, but considering her title, preface, and introduction, Walker seems especially to invite that reading. In particular, the entire first section of the book addresses artistic creation. Beauty "is where we begin," the section's epigraph by Robert Clark declares (3). Functioning as invocation for the collection, the first poem addresses God the maker. Its language, surprisingly colloquial for a prayer (not "photosynthesis" but "photo-what's-it"), sets the theme of holiness within the ordinary, a theme underscored by its final lines: "our words soaring / like yours through time, dangerous, ordinary words" (5). Subsequent poems in this section deal with the act of creation, but always from the angle of the intersection of the abstract (divine art) and the concrete (earthiness, human nature). A young girl wrestles a pencil in an effort to print her name ("Sophie"—we will see her again later); a mother prays that her son's music might save him "from

bad weather / loneliness, ill temper" (7). "The Violinist" is not about Beethoven's music but about the boy learning to play it. The poem about an orchestra is not about its accomplished performance but about the delight of its musical warm-up. In this section, we meet the character of the cobbler, who moves forward in his work even though "there's no map" (14). This cobbler could be God, or a guide—or even a metaphor for the pilgrim. He will reappear near the end of the book to give us the lesson of the journey: "You find the path by walking" (65).

The second section is about the longing for connection—with others, with God, and with the self—and, in the face of a failure to connect, the effort of a soul to make peace with that. In "Breaking the Blue Bowl," the speaker is dealing with the aftermath of an argument ("the shattered wine glass" and "one lovely friendship bobbled"), but she makes her way, in the end, to a place of serenity within herself: "Love the tattered fall. / Forgive yourself" (18). In "The Knock on Your Door Disguised as a Sonnet," the speaker addresses a "Darling," sharing the lesson she has learned: "things fall into one another's arms / to find out who they are" (19). In "Baker," as in others, the speaker addresses herself: "You want to be bread broken," she says, the symbol of sacrament applying both to the yearning speaker of the poem and to poetry itself as something that connects (20). In the final poem of the section, "Poinsettia," the speaker describes the surprising new growth of an apparently-dead flower that had been thrown on the compost pile. With the last line, "Who knows now which twig will next flower?," we are invited into the metaphor of personal regrowth when all seems dead—an apt transition into the next section, which centers on death and grief (27).

When dealing with a subject as large as death, a poet must depend on images and sound to keep the work from tilting into sentimentality. And Walker succeeds in walking that line. These images are powerful. Take the image of the outline of a body made on the ground by the speaker in "While Hiking in Fall Without Pen and Paper, I Make Mental Notes." It brings to mind children making snow angels, "changing the planet permanently / for a minute" (31). Here is a variation on the theme of carpé diem that stays in the reader's mind the way it remains on the ground—and which is, again, a great metaphor for what poetry can do. Another memorable image is the green fluorescent light in tension with the afternoon light in "After the Death Bed: Fourteen Lines Separated and Wandering."

In "Reunion," a bereaved son hurries home after his mother's death, driving, because "to fly / would be to peel too fast the onion of his hurt" (34). Here, the strict rhythm of the line adds to the effect of the metaphor to create the anxious tension of the bereaved. In "Reversal," the abstract longing for a return to lost peace becomes visible as scrambled eggs, "fried and fragrant on a plate," uncook themselves and return to their shells (48). In "Grief," the bereaved looks for "a knob to steer the day"—and again, the rhythm steers us through an emotional poem (37).

This section is the longest of the book, and it feels long. The length creates the sense of claustrophobia that comes with the aftermath of death. The whole section is a working through of grief. In "Working to Save Yourself," the speaker sees a rower on the lake: "She's me but far / beyond the buoy in the darkness," she says (43). She sets a place at the table for that other, lost self, folding "napkins into sailboats" that might "tow her back from danger" (43). Perhaps these poems are the paper sailboats that will save the grieving soul from drift. The only poem in the book which breaks out of sonnet form is "Rummaging Through Language to Find a Sonnet." It's first half is a paragraph, shocking in its messiness on the page after the orderliness of all the sonnets which came before it. But by the end (in fact, just at the volta) it has wrestled itself into a sestet. Thus has the poet pulled herself through the meaning-making process, "Gathering herself to stand" by the end (45).

The final section of the book explores silence. "It is silence, finally," Walker says about this section, "that gives meaning to language" (XXIV). The same, of course, goes for music—and for poetry. A poem, especially one in strict form whose lines and white spaces are measured so purposefully, is aware of the silence it breaks and dances with. This section commences with "At the Ocean," a place where the busy mind, lacking other distraction, "finds metaphor" (53). And the metaphor for the poem and for this section is stated at the poem's close: "How I see better what / is there / after sitting quietly with what is not" (53). The speaker in these poems longs for silence and prizes it. In one poem, the speaker is "poor" because she feels anxious in silence (54). In another, the speaker, overwhelmed at the cacophony of busy Philadelphia, envies a nun who walks nearby "silent, alert, willing / herself to be here, smiling" (55). That poem stands in contrast to an earlier poem in the collection about a busy city—that

time New York—which appears in the first section of the book. The earlier poem celebrates the "fragrant bling" and "babble" and "all quirk and shine and possibility" of a city street (12). But here, in this final section of the book, the speaker is farther along on her journey: older, more tired—perhaps a little shell-shocked. In another poem this older traveler tries to "quench / the city" (58), or, in another, to become like a leaf that can feel its mass only now, "since it let go" (59).

In "Nightmare," characters from earlier poems (Beethoven, Rembrandt) reappear only to disappear into meaninglessness, "only letters, dumb, drifting down," leaving "in their place / cold iambs" (64). This is a good description of a poet's nightmare, but at the volta we are saved: "And then I turn" (the volta being a great place for a turn!) "to see a finch," the speaker says, and the beauty of a tiny detail of real life, a bird, saves the day (64). The poem ends with the hopeful reappearance of young Sophie laughing as she—successfully, this time—"writes the perfect letters of her name" (64).

Now, near the end of the book, the cobbler also returns. He is here to tend to the "homely," "foul" boots that belong to the speaker ("you") (65). In his hands, "you" see that your boots "might be holy" (65). As might you, reader, with your boots now worn down by the pilgrimage. He concludes with the admonishment to all to "Attend"—to the birds, he means (65). To life.

"May we find / ourselves by letting ourselves go," the last poem prays (a captivating use of the line break there) (67), and we end our journey having been invited to move out into the world with greater receptiveness to the holiness around us, something easier to do because of our experience with these sonnets. "On the bus back home, you see your city better," the speaker of an earlier poem says about the effects of engagement with art (11). Not an unreasonable goal for art, nor an unfulfilled one here. Read this book; it will help you attend.

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Restless Secularism: Modernism and the Religious Inheritance. By Matthew Mutter. Yale UP, 2017. 320 pp. $85 (hardback).

On the cusp of the twentieth century, the American poet-critic Edmund Clarence Stedman announced the "twilight of the poets," an interval in literary history during which poetry receded from the popular imagination, folding instead to the twin ascendency of a public taste for both natural science and naturalistic prose fiction.[1] For Stedman, the secularization of culture had necessarily corresponded with the eclipse of poetry, a mode most appropriate for voicing the ineffable, the spiritual, and the ideal. Foreshadowing the pagan poetics of William Butler Yeats, Stedman points out that one of the problems with poetry is that it lost its relationship with the natural world when it slipped into subjective, lyric modes under the influence of Christianity. Due to its introspective and confessional nature, "the Christian motive," Stedman writes, "has intensified the self-expression of the modern singer" who risks unhealthy egotism and the "disturbed vision of eyes too long strained inward" (140). However, even as he diagnoses the religious reasons for poetry's "twilight interval" and attempts to offer a more "scientific" paradigm that reconceptualizes poetic inspiration as the integrated and energetic transmission of physical, universal "vibrations" filling the cosmos (52), the critic does little more than adapt a religious imaginary for a secular age, deploying persistently occult and idealistic language to analyze the "nature and elements" of poetry. For example, as she channels universal vibrations, the true poet refracts the "universal soul" through her "particular nature" (45), piercing through to a spiritual actuality that only the rare scientist (endowed, of course, with a poetic soul) can ever hope to access through a systematic study of the natural world. Indeed, in Stedman's account, poetry is still essentially the revealer of secret things.

For Stedman, the crisis facing poetry was a crisis of the imagination: poetry had not yet adapted itself to a secular and scientific age. But Stedman falls short of providing a meaningful alternative by merely adapting poetry to secular demands, maintaining what Matthew Mutter calls in his new

[1]For an extensive discussion of the "twilight of the poets" vis-à-vis the "poetry wars" of the late nineteenth century, see Renker.

book, *Restless Secularism: Modernism and the Religious Inheritance*, a fundamentally religious "imaginary" (7). According to Mutter, one of the main projects shared by modernist writers like Wallace Stevens, Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, and W. H. Auden was to "revise" the literary imaginary by ridding it of outdated and ultimately regressive religious idioms, desires, and paradigms. Importantly, for some of the writers that Mutter considers, the project inspired some ambivalence, as well as imperfect attempts to envision a truly "secular imaginary." Over the course of four chapters, each focused on a single author, Mutter describes modernism's agonized contortions as its practitioners sought to "adapt," "substitute," or "eliminate" the "Christian and Platonic legacies" in which they found themselves ensnared (8).

Though Stevens, Woolf, Yeats, and Auden each deployed distinct strategies for adumbrating a secular imaginary, the story Mutter tells is one of deep ambivalence, a "restless" secularism unsettled by its own project, by the consequences that radical disenchantment might have for literature and for aesthetic experience as such. This complex, highly detailed portrait of restlessness is sometimes as exasperating as it is rewarding, as Mutter painstakingly demonstrates the feints and jabs that each writer takes against religious thought, only to subsequently regress, retreat, or uneasily embrace elements of the very theological paradigms that Mutter so trenchantly shows were anathema to the modernist revolution.

In Chapter 1, Wallace Stevens epitomizes this tortuous ambivalence, at first experimenting with alternatives to the anthropomorphism and transcendental analogies deeply inscribed in poetic language, while later on concluding "that language, and so the poetic imagination as such, is an intractably religious element in which certain kinds of desires are created that are not simply 'immanent'" (56). In his quest for a poetry of this-worldly immanence, Stevens apparently stalled out and "came to accept that speech inevitably takes on a religious dimension" (64). Along the way, however, he developed his signature tautological aesthetic, "a secular employment of language that intensifies rather than displaces immediate experience of the world" (33). According to Mutter, Stevens ultimately managed to split the difference, settling for a theory of poetry "as a mode of transcendence-in-immanence that nonetheless remains anchored in the physical world" (33). In practice this looks like a transcendence *into* life, a deeper experience of immanence.

Virginia Woolf, the odd novelist in this study's clique of poets, also struggles to resolve competing tendencies toward "religious and secular conceptions of reality" in her fiction (65). To dramatize this struggle, Mutter focuses in Chapter 2 on Woolf's fascination with beauty as related to, but radically distinct from, the aesthetic category of the sublime. The transition from valuing beauty to valuing the sublime runs parallel to the history of religion and secularism. Woolf's interest in the concept of beauty, traditionally associated with harmony, reconciliation, transcendent order, and universal goodness, is symptomatic of her ambivalent fealty to the secular sublime, which "undermines all religious pretensions of moral and aesthetic order" (96), replacing a worldview that "smuggle[s] a concept of God back into the picture" with an aesthetics of difference, tumult, and alienation (77). After a series of close readings, Mutter concludes that "Woolf is uncomfortable assigning a final ontological legitimacy to experiences of either the beautiful or the sublime" (106) and finishes the chapter by speculating that Woolf may have at least tacitly believed in a creator (113). Much like Stevens, the British novelist was not only ambivalent toward the viability of a secular imaginary distinct from a religious aesthetics of beauty, but actually resigned herself to a theistic worldview.

W. B. Yeats provides a somewhat different case in Chapter 3, aggressively undermining Christian culture and its manifestation in modernity as an exaggerated valuation of "the personal, inward dimension of the self" by introducing an impersonal, passion-driven neo-paganism as a poetic alternative (117). Unlike Stevens or Woolf, Yeats was not seduced by the prospects of secular humanism, proposing instead a "a rival vision of the sacred" (114). Mutter is able to align pagan sacrality with a secular outlook by emphasizing how Yeats harnessed paganism's tragic affirmation of the violent but "generative forces of the world" as a way to signal "secular dedication" to "radical immanence" (128). Mutter is less interested in considering Yeats's actual beliefs in the "agonistic ontology" underwriting neo-paganism than he is in foregrounding the ways in which Yeats's impersonal, willful, immanentist pagan agonism inflected the poet's ideas about human passion. Against "the inwardness of 'modern lyric feeling'" (119), Yeats proposes a daimonic turn toward impersonalizing passions like rage or joy that dissolve illusions of an effete "modern subjectivity." However, as with both Stevens and Woolf, Yeats vacillates in his commitment to repudiating

Christian models of the sacred, ultimately relying on a religious imaginary to help him articulate some of the central terms of his neopagan passion project. Moreover, Mutter insightfully identifies the ethical pitfalls that riddle Yeats's pact with pagan gods: as soon as the poet embraces his "agonistic ontology," in which conflict and warring opposites are thought to be a basic universal fact, he relinquishes claims to "any Christian or secular vision of responsibility, judgment, and mourning" (142). In other words, to accept or affirm the world as a chaotic flux of violently clashing forces is to lose the ability to take responsibility for human violence or to mete out justice or make moral judgments on the basis of human agency. Yeats sacrifices the idea of human history as a distinctly human field of action and responsibility when he "collapses history into natural necessity," thereby obliterating any distinction between "war as a historical event and conflict and loss as ontological conditions" (143).

Mutter's account of Yeats paves the way for his analysis of W. H. Auden's secular poetics in Chapter 4. If the modernist writers in *Restless Secularism* should be judged by their ability to make good on their plans to develop a secular imaginary, Auden is by far the most successful, or at least the most consistent. But Mutter also implies that Auden's secular, humanistic "affirmative dualism" had to be formed in response to Yeatsian obsessions with magic and the occult. In Mutter's telling, the magical worldview, stemming from disillusion and alienation, is no better than the rationalistic instrumentalism it tries to subvert; indeed, "modern instrumental reason is analogous to magic in that both seek the manipulation of the material world for natural ends: success and domination" (178). As we saw in the case of Yeats, magic collapses the difference between human actions and natural phenomena, ostensibly putting the human in closer contact with the natural world. For Auden, on the other hand, "secularism is useful for its power to distinguish between the 'historical' (the unique element of human personhood) and the 'natural' (the repeatable element of material life)" (165). Mutter shows how Auden's "affirmative dualism" offers the opportunity for responsible historical critique, so necessary in the wake of mid-century fascisms fueled by neopagan outlooks, while at the same time preserving the separate reality of an impersonal natural order. According to Mutter, "Auden sees the ontological distance of the nonhuman world as a gift and occasion for wonder rather than as a sign of alienation" (175).

While Mutter's reading of Auden is a powerful and hard-earned climax to his literary history of modernist secularism, he only briefly dwells on the role that "wonder" plays in Auden's work. As a result, the specific utility of the poet's "affirmative dualism" remains vague. How is wonder different from enchantment? How is wonder different from Woolf's secular sublime? How exactly is it possible that wonder does not simply devolve into alienation in the void interposed by Auden between the historical and natural worlds? These important questions, relating to secularism as an actual "imaginary," and not merely an ethical position, seem to go unanswered.

Ultimately, *Restless Secularism* is a robust and exacting analysis of the anxious relationship between modernist writers and secularism as applied to literary endeavors. One walks away from Mutter's book with a sense of the tenacity of the religious worldview, as well as a new appreciation of the moral, ethical, political, and aesthetic dividends that might pay out at the advent of a truly "secular imaginary." Manifestly, however, Stevens, Woolf, and Yeats were unable to clinch the prize, although their attempts to do so changed the face of anglophone literature in terms of its aesthetic and political commitments. With Auden, Mutter proposes a good, clean model for the future of secularism, though, as I have observed, there are some questions left unresolved about the viability of the poet's "affirmative dualism" as a true alternative to both fascist neopaganism and transcendental or religious frames of mind.

I find that *Restless Secularism* pairs in provocative ways with another release from 2018, John Michael's *Secular Lyric: The Modernization of the Poem in Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson*, which argues that three nineteenth century American poets adapted to secular conditions in which poetry was no longer associated with transcendental meaning or universal truth. Embracing the new fragmentary conditions of modernity, Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson reimagined the lyric as a heteroglossic, plural form reflective of the secular decentralization of authority and monovocal fiat. It is interesting to compare Mutter and Michael as literary historians, as Michael roots the origins of literary secularization in the mid-nineteenth century. But the contrast is perhaps even more instructive in terms of the curation of literary archives, as Mutter does not explain the specific virtues of a transatlantic project, nor does he extensively reflect on his decision to analyze both poetry and prose fiction without attending to the different

ways in which both were used and viewed at the turn of the twentieth-century. By beginning this review with Stedman and closing it Michael's *Secular Lyric*, I would like to suggest that genre matters in the history of secularization, and that it may be worthwhile to attend to the historically and inexchangeably specific allegiances that poetry, say, as a mode distinct from prose fiction, may have had vis-à-vis the religious imaginary.

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***Black Freethinkers: A History of African-American Secularism*. By Christopher Cameron. Northwestern UP, 2017. 248 pp. $100 (hardcover); $35 (paperback).**

Christopher Cameron's *Black Freethinkers: A History of African-American Secularism* is a book of seminal importance to the fields of African-American literature and culture, U.S. religious history, and black theology, among others. *Black Freethinkers* rejects the long-held belief (both popular and scholarly) that African-Americans were more "naturally religious" than their white counterparts, arguing instead that black freethought has played a crucial and influential role in the political, intellectual, and personal lives of African-Americans throughout U.S. history. Cameron notably takes a liberal view of "black freethought," including under this banner atheism, agnosticism, deism, humanism, paganism, theological liberalism, and even religious practitioners with unorthodox beliefs

or sustained doubts and skepticisms. With this expansive—if somewhat controversial—definition, Cameron charts a truly ground-breaking history of African-American secularism that has long been neglected and sidelined in U.S. religious historiography, mapping the broad contours of black freethought's beginnings and evolution from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. In opposition to most U.S. historians and scholars of religion, Cameron places black freethought at the heart of African-American religious history, tracing its origins to the institution of slavery itself. Ultimately, Cameron demonstrates that while black freethinkers remained only a small portion of the overall black population, they nonetheless had a substantial impact on African-American life and culture. This conclusion is Cameron's most revelatory and powerful argument, one that critically orients and sustains *Black Freethinkers* from cover-to-cover.

As noted, *Black Freethinkers* is a direct refutation to the long tradition of assuming the natural religiosity of U.S. blacks. Most scholars on African-American religion have tended to presume this belief, reiterating it, more often than not, within the contexts of studies focused on protestant African-American Christianity. More recently, other scholars like Edward Curtis IV, Michael Gomez, Yvonne Chireau, and Erin Salius have contributed to our picture of black religious life with scholarship on alternative, non-Protestant faiths, including African-American Islam, conjure traditions, folk religions, and even Catholicism. Cameron's book contributes to this growing trend by recovering, quite originally, the voices of black doubters, skeptics, and non-believers. Furthermore, Cameron gives us a far more comprehensive and historically-rooted account for understanding black freethought than the scattered group of scholars and critics—Anthony Pinn (philosopher), Christopher Grasso (historian), Daniel Fountain (historian), and David Goatley (theologian), to name but a few—whose own works have proffered insightful and beneficial, yet partial and fragmentary readings of African-American secularism. Lastly, Cameron's book upends most narratives on the origins of American freethought by arguing that far from Enlightenment philosophy, Newtonian science, and modernity's presuppositional moral frameworks that supposedly contributed to U.S. secularization, particularly in the North, black freethought *also emerged in the South* due to the brutality of the institution of slavery, a reality for many slaves that made them question God's goodness, justice, and power—even his existence—amidst such human

injustice and racial oppression. Cameron's interventions are impressively executed in each of his four chronologically-organized chapters, alongside his extensively-archived source materials that reveal a long history of black freethinkers from all walks of American life, from fugitive slaves (Frederick Douglass and Charles Ball) to Harlem Renaissance artists (Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes) to radical leftist activists (Huey Newton and W.E.B. DuBois), and many more. Cameron's well-researched and diverse range of source materials—including slave narratives, travel accounts, novels, poetry, memoirs, newspapers, church records, sermons, and letters—help to establish his strong case for the existence of a black freethought tradition in U.S. history. Most importantly, Cameron's evidentiary support is not only impeccably contextualized and laid out plainly for readers to see, it also highlights the extent to which the black freethought tradition helped shape and influence many of the most critical junctures in African-American history. As a consequence, Cameron's historical methodology does more than merely plot a timeline of U.S. black freethought; it also demonstrates the importance of black freethinkers in the unfolding of American history itself.

Chapter one takes up fugitive slave autobiographers (and other antebellum commentators) who documented the growth of religious skepticism in both the pre-Civil War South and the "free" North. Cameron surveys a relatively wide swath of slave narrative writers—from Frederick Douglass to Harriet Jacobs to Austin Steward—who, as he contends, testify to the historical presence of black nonbelief within slave communities across the slave South. Amongst other reasons, Cameron argues that proslavery religion and Southerners' hypocritical professions of Christian faith, alongside slaves' doubts concerning God's goodness and justice (i.e. the problem of evil) and the lack of religious instruction and spiritual edification in the South, pointed to the institution of slavery as an important source of black freethought in the U.S. Much of Cameron's impetus for this chapter is to provide important new evidence for African-American secularism in the antebellum U.S.—evidence that has long been ignored or undervalued in earlier scholarship. His evidence is both compelling and comprehensive. For example, he discusses those black Americans who participated in the freethought movement during the postbellum and *fin de siècle* periods of nineteenth century America, exploring prominent African-Americans'

contributions to advancing new, more strident forms of black deism, humanism, skepticism, agnosticism, liberalism, and heterodoxy. Black intellectuals and educated professionals—like Frederick Douglass, David Cincore, Lord A. Nelson, W.E.B. DuBois, and R.S. King—seeded not only their own unique ideas, views, and politics into U.S. secularism but also laid the groundwork for its more robust and fecund emergence in the early twentieth century. In Cameron's reading of the evidence, black freethinkers in the late nineteenth century simultaneously acknowledged the general dearth of skepticism and nonbelief in African-American culture and imagined themselves as—in Cameron's helpful term—"ambassadors" to black religious communities. Their goal was two-fold: to incline the African-American community towards secularism and to serve as representatives of black freethought within the broader (mostly white) U.S. freethought movement.

In chapter two, Cameron discusses the Harlem Renaissance of the early twentieth century and identifies various of the cultural trends and social developments that helped facilitate the burgeoning black critique of Christianity. As a result of the Great Migration by blacks to northern, urban cities, black freethinkers encountered alternative freethinking perspectives with greater frequency—including atheism, agnosticism, deism, and the Baha'I faith. Black freethought flourished in these new, intellectually fertile environs, often finding expression within the black letters and arts of the 1920s and 1930s. As Cameron forcefully demonstrates, writers and artists such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, and Alain Locke began to articulate more coherent and sustained freethinking positions, producing works that both helped undermine orthodox Christianity within the newly formed black intellectual communities and encouraged those same communities to express their secular faiths in print and in public. Recent scholarly debates on secularism have centered around whether or not modernity's forces of industrialization, technological development, urbanization, and scientific materialism led to the rise of U.S. black secularism—in fine, one version of the secularization thesis generally (i.e. as the West modernizes, it secularizes). Cameron navigates a "middle path" that neither accepts nor rejects this secularization story, instead positing that urbanization and northern migration helped cultivate spaces of black freethought where African-Americans felt open to express their anti-religious and non-religious views. In addition, Cameron finds important links between black feminism

and black freethought in women writers like Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston, showing how these women contributed to anti-patriarchal thought and politics by drawing on irreligious convictions and secular discourses, even as most black freethinkers continued to be men. Cameron demonstrates that early twentieth century black freethinkers worked to merge together *both* the white and black freethought movements, thereby bringing together the religious skepticism and atheism of nineteenth century black freethought with its twentieth century counterpart: secular humanism. This, for Cameron, is a major transformation in the history of American freethought, one that resulted in a black secular vision that would turn many blacks away from otherworldly transcendence toward this-worldly immanence, most notably in black freethinkers who embraced socialism and communism.

Chapter three, accordingly, turns to black freethinkers who committed themselves to anti-capitalist and radical leftist politics between World War I and World War II. National freethought organizations, publications, and social groups had gradually formed by the early twentieth century, but as many disbanded or folded during the interwar years, socialist and communist political activism allowed new venues for black secularists to voice their reservations about and antagonisms toward religion and capitalism. Hubert Harrison, A Phillip Randolph, W.E.B. DuBois, Harry Haywood, Audley Moore, and Richard Wright were among a number of African-American freethinkers who critiqued Christianity, and religion writ large, as a tool of power and domination that fueled the racism of U.S. society and undermined the proletarian revolution necessary for the liberation of poor blacks. Communist and socialist philosophies—often amenable to the politics of anti-colonialism, black nationalism, anti-racism, and anti-imperialism—suited many black freethinkers well as they attempted to link black struggles against capitalism and racism with black struggles to undermine the power of religion. As Cameron shows, by the 1920s and 1930s, African-American freethinkers not only criticized Christianity as the "white man's religion" but also attacked black Christianity itself, thereby subverting a religious faith they saw as inimical to black progress. Cameron's insights into black women whose freethought inspired them to work towards greater gender, sexual, and racial equality testifies to his ability to illustrate, once again, how black women were important and dynamic actors in feminist and socialist politics because of their secularism.

Finally, chapter four highlights the important role black freethinking activists played in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In comparison to previous generations, it was mid-century black freethinkers who took the most aggressive and vocal approaches to criticizing Christianity as secular thought gradually became less and less taboo. With increased educational opportunities and the growth of de-stigmatized secular beliefs in U.S. culture, black secularists would now be found comfortably in every major radical political movement and counter-cultural ideology of the period, from mainstream Civil Rights leaders and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to the Black Arts movement and the Black Panthers. Cameron's fourth chapter follows the individual contributions of well-known black secularists, in this case, Lorraine Hansberry, Huey Newton, James Baldwin, James Forman, and others, who—like their predecessors—continued to undermine white Christianity, but did so through organized politics by explicitly lambasting religion's support of oppression toward the African-American community—namely, in racism, classism, and patriarchy. This point is no small fare. In fact, as Cameron argues, it was these very men and women who later paved the way for the institutionalization of the black freethought movement in professional organizations dedicated to advancing secularism in American culture and life. A brief nine-page afterword speaks to this important development in the history of U.S. black freethought by examining the literary career of black freethinker Alice Walker, ultimately using her life as a representative story of the black freethinking tradition in late twentieth century America. Cameron also points to contemporary black secular organizations—Black Atheists of America, African Americans for Humanism, and Black Nonbelievers—to demonstrate the fruits of black freethinkers' labor in the past that allowed for the rich (albeit small) flourishing of African-American secularism in the present, both organizationally and existentially.

Cameron's *Black Freethinkers* is an impressive history of African-American freethought, one that fills in a major lacuna in our scholarship by identifying and highlighting the significant impact of black doubters, skeptics, and unbelievers in U.S. history. The importance of this insight cannot be overstated. As early as the 1970s, Albert J. Raboteau remarked in his seminal monograph *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* that "not all slaves took solace in religion . . . a fact which

should temper generalizations about the piety of all slaves" (313–14). Unfortunately, only a few critics heeded Raboteau's caution in the four decades following the book's publication, but with Cameron's striking and well-articulated evidence presented for readers in chapter one, we can now say Raboteau's words have been genuinely heard and taken seriously. Cameron's tight prose and historical perspicacity also allow the reader to become engrossed in his sweeping historical narrative, which he masterfully unfolds in just 174 pages. Stylistically speaking, the book is easily navigable and logically organized by its relatively chronological structure—with chapter sub-sections that also link black freethought to major movements in African-American history and culture. Readers of *Literature and Belief* will be pleased with the book's sustained attentiveness to African-American writers and their literary works, something that makes the book read, quite satisfyingly, like an in-depth and incisive literary history of black freethought rather than a general history. I was particularly struck by Cameron's effective use of evidence in illustrating how integral black freethought was to radical black politics in the twentieth century. For instance, Cameron carefully delineates how the secular humanism of Black Panther party cofounder and activist Huey Newton—with his belief in blacks' "god-like" powers to achieve political and economic salvation, here and now, in this life—directly informs one of the party's central slogans, "All Power to the People," in effect, a mantra that spoke to the Black Panther's secular ontology of power that undergirded the party's fight against capitalism and racism.

With that said, I would like to offer one qualification to my otherwise overwhelmingly positive review: despite its considerable methodological sophistication and impressive depth of historical analysis, *Black Freethinkers* sometimes fails to take into sufficient account the nuances of what one means when one invokes such generic categories as "religion," "secularism," "freethought," "irreligion," and "nonbelief," especially in relation to race in the U.S. "Irreligious"—as opposed to what? Where does a "religious" instance slide into something "irreligious," or vice versa? "Secularism," in regards to what? Is one addressing U.S. political ideology or non-Christian conviction (or something else entirely)? "Nonbelief"—as a renunciation of what our human condition is? Belief, after all, is a fundamentally inescapable reality for both "religious" and "secular" persons.

This lack of nuance with respect to important terms may be Cameron's only major misstep in *Black Freethinkers*. Take, for example, his surprisingly expansive definition of black "freethought." To Cameron, the category includes "the anti-religious (atheists or agnostics)" and "those [African-Americans] who believed in private or unconventional faiths (such as deism) that were at odds with traditional religious beliefs," but it also encompasses African-Americans who "posited a belief in God," "used religious [i.e. Christian] language," and held theologically-liberal or "unorthodox" views that "challenged prevailing religious ideas and institutions" (ix, 4). Unfortunately, this expansive definition of what constitutes "black free-thought" or what makes one a "black freethinker" tends to elide or obscure important differences between related but separate categories. For example, without any further clarification, the category implies that faithful African-American Christians who expressed doubts about, or skepticism, towards select aspects of Christian thought and practice could, in principle, at least, be considered black freethinkers, *even though they continued to maintain faith in—and allegiance to—Christianity*. As a consequence, Cameron's definition too often fails to meaningfully distinguish between the critiques or doubts that inspired theological reflection and spiritual transformation within Christianity and the questions and criticisms that actually began to form what we might call a "freethinking" black subjectivity beyond Christendom. In some respects, the very fungibility of his category threatens to call into question Cameron's vital project of recovering non-Christian and post-Christian voices in African-American history by citing evidence that may run the risk of not being quite "secular" or "freethinking" enough—and to do so because such terms are taken *prima facie* and not clearly defined. For all its strengths, then, Cameron's book would have benefited from a more fully developed and more carefully nuanced consideration of such determinate categories as "religious," "secular," "freethought," and "nonbelief."

Fungable categories aside, *Black Freethinkers: A History of African-American Secularism* is a testament to Cameron's historical acumen, lucid prose, and brilliant argumentation. *Black Freethinkers* is a truly pioneering work that, for the first time, provides us with a "secular" cartography for reimagining a more comprehensive map of African-American life and culture. All must now reckon with Cameron's account if they are to understand the history of black secularity for all its worth.

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